

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Update and Liaison Report



Spring 2022

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Jekyll Island, Georgia, March 7-11, 2022.

Below is a summary of the Council's actions:

Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule Amendment

Staff presented the most recent actions and alternatives language drafted by the IPT concerning the acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rule (with focus on the stock risk rating), carry-overs, and revisions to framework procedures. The SSC Chair provided SSC recommendations. The Council provided direction to staff for further development of the amendment. The draft amendment will be reviewed and considered for public hearings at the June 2022 Council meeting.

Allocations Decision Tool

The tool involves a decision tree approach and online tool to assist the Council in incorporating multiple types of information into sector allocation decisions. The Council reviewed the approach at a special meeting on February 7, 2022 and discussed an example of how to apply the approach to greater amberjack. At the March meeting the Council further discussed the approach, potential changes, and how to use the tool moving forward. The Council directed staff to develop an additional online tool to collect public input on topics relevant to allocations and long-term trends in the fisheries and to update Fishery Performance Report discussion questions to gather more input on social and economic factors. The decision tree approach and online tool will be applied to Spanish mackerel for review by the Council at the December 2022 meeting.

Commercial Electronic Logbook Amendment

The Council directed staff to begin work on an amendment that would authorize NMFS to implement electronic reporting for commercial fisheries managed by the South Atlantic Council. The Council will review an options paper at the June 2022 meeting.

SEDAR Items

The Council approved the terms of reference for the Yellowtail Snapper Interim Analysis.

Dolphin Wahoo Regulatory Amendment 2

This amendment includes measures to extend the applicable geographic range of the minimum size limit, establish separate recreational retention limits onboard for-hire and private vessels, and remove or reduce captain and crew bag limits for dolphin. The Council approved the amendment for public scoping and will review the amendment at the June 2022 meeting.

Atlantic King Mackerel (CMP Amendment 34)

This amendment includes measures to update catch levels for Atlantic king mackerel based on the most recent assessment and modify recreational management measures, including increasing the bag limit in federal waters off Florida and modifying the requirement to land fish with heads and fins intact. The Council reviewed draft rationale and approved the following definition: damaged fish refers to king or Spanish mackerel that are damaged only through natural predation. The Council approved the amendment for formal review.

Snapper Grouper Amendments

Release Mortality Reduction & Red Snapper Catch Levels

In December 2021, the Council directed staff to investigate management measures that could reduce mortality of released snapper grouper species and the frequency of encounters with fish that cannot be kept. By implementing a measure to reduce such encounters, the Council also intends to reduce discards of red snapper, possibly resulting in revision of the SSC's recommended ABC for red snapper. Staff presented an overview of the magnitude of the discard problem in the snapper grouper fishery and a summary of benefits and challenges of management measures considered thus far. The Council formally initiated Regulatory Amendment 35 to reduce snapper grouper releases, initially developing options based on time, area, and depth restrictions, and to implement catch levels for red snapper based on the most recent SSC recommendation. Staff will gather available information and present it to the Council in June 2022. The Council will then provide additional direction for development of management alternatives.

Recreational Reporting/Permitting Amendment (Amendment 46)

The Council received recommendations from the Private Recreational Reporting Workgroup, which met five times in 2021 and 2022, and discussed resuming development of Amendment 46 to establish a permit and reporting requirements for the private recreational snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic region. An Ad Hoc Advisory Panel will be appointed in June 2022 and the Council will resume discussion of the amendment at their September 2022 meeting.

Wreckfish ITQ Modernization (Amendment 48)

This amendment addresses recommendations from the 2019 review of the Wreckfish ITQ Program and revises the objectives for the Snapper Grouper FMP. The amendment is expected to take some time to develop due to the nature of some of the actions under considerations (e.g., moving away from a paper coupon-based program to an electronic program). Staff reviewed a decision document with updated actions and alternatives for consideration. The Council approved the range of actions which address sector allocations, electronic reporting, the

wreckfish permit, season and spawning closures, vessel monitoring requirements, offloading sites and times, and cost recovery.

Snowy Grouper (Amendment 51)

The amendment adjusts catch levels based on the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 36 Update). Snowy grouper are overfished and undergoing overfishing. A rebuilding plan is currently in place and is not being modified. The Council removed consideration of a spawning season closure for the commercial sector and requested additional input from the Snapper Grouper AP on commercial trip limit modifications and consideration of regional management. The Council also picked preferred alternatives to facilitate analysis for the ACL/ABC, allocations, and commercial trip limit actions. Additionally, a Citizen Science project is being explored to obtain additional data on snowy grouper. The Council is expected to approve the amendment for public hearings in June 2022.

Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish (Amendment 52)

The amendment increases catch levels for golden tilefish based on the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 66), revises sector allocations, and considers changes to commercial management measures (fishing year and trip limits) and recreational post-season accountability measures. The Council directed staff to convene a meeting of the golden tilefish commercial longline endorsement holders to discuss way to improve management of that gear sector. There are 23 vessels in the South Atlantic that hold such endorsements. The amendment also includes actions to modify recreational management measures for blueline tilefish (reduce the bag limit, prohibit retention by captain and crew on for-hire vessels, and modify the recreational season) and revise the post-season recreational accountability measure. The Council is expected to approve the amendment for public hearings in June 2022.

Gag (Amendment 53)

The amendment responds to the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 71). Gag are overfished and undergoing overfishing. The amendment would establish a 10-year rebuilding plan, adjust catch levels and management measures to end overfishing. During the March meeting the Council reviewed a novel allocation method, removed options to modify the minimum size limit for both sectors, and modified the range of options for the recreational vessel limit. In addition, the Council removed consideration of restrictions to spearfishing gear and picked preferred actions to facilitate analysis for the rebuilding plan and ACL/ABC Actions. The Council is expected to approve the amendment for public hearings in June 2022.

Greater Amberjack (Amendment 49)

The amendment adjusts catch levels in response to the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 59). Greater amberjack are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The Council indicated their preference to retain the current recreational minimum size limit and explore additional sector allocation alternatives. In addition, the Council requested AP input on the commercial minimum size limit, commercial seasonal trip limits, and April spawning closure. The Council approved the draft amendment for public hearings, which will be conducted during the public comment session at the June 2022 Council meeting.