

# South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

## Update and Liaison Report



### Summer 2022

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Key West, Florida, June 13-17, 2022. Below is a summary of the Council's actions.

#### **2021 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year**

The Council discussed the three nominations submitted during closed session and voted to honor the crew of FWC's Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) *Osprey*, Master Officer Clay McDonough and Officer Specialist Chris Demeter, with the 2021 award. The award will be presented during the Council's September 2022 meeting in Charleston, SC.

#### **Public Data-Gathering Tool**

Council staff presented a public input tool designed to help gather information that would inform answers to some of the questions within the Allocation Decision Tool. The online tool will allow members of the public to provide similar input to that of advisory panel members when conducting fishery performance reports. The Council had the following feedback:

- Revise the name to be Fair Catch or Saltwater Conversations
- Ensure the input requested is not too personal in nature.
- Note that the information gathered through this tool will be used broadly to help inform management decisions – not only when discussing allocations.

The Council directed staff to work with NOAA GC to determine if the information gathered through this tool would require Paperwork Reduction Act approval.

#### **Commercial Electronic Logbook Amendment**

Council staff presented an overview of the proposed action in the amendment. The amendment would move the paper-based commercial logbooks under the Coastal Logbook Program to an electronic platform. Staff provided background on the Councils' previous guidance and requested clarification on which Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) would be amended. The Council restated their intent to include amending the following FMPs: South Atlantic Snapper Grouper, Atlantic Dolphin Wahoo, Gulf and South Atlantic Coastal Migratory Pelagics, and Gulf Reef Fish. South Atlantic Council staff will work jointly with Gulf Council staff and SERO to develop the amendment as a Categorical Exclusion and finalize for submission by the end of

2022. The SEFSC clarified that both the commercial discard logbook and the economic add-on survey are considered part of the Coastal Logbook data collection program and would also be transferred to an electronic platform.

### **Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule Amendment**

This amendment considers revisions to the Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule for the Dolphin Wahoo, Golden Crab, and Snapper Grouper FMPs, including the incorporation of phase-ins of ABC changes and carry-overs of unused portions of annual catch limits. The Council selected a preferred alternative to modify the ABC Control Rule for the three FMPs and approved the amendment for public hearings. The Council directed to conduct an online hearing ahead of the September meeting and an in-person hearing during the public comment session at the September meeting in Charleston, SC.

### **Snapper Grouper Amendments**

#### *Release Mortality Reduction & Red Snapper Catch Levels*

Regulatory Amendment 35 was initiated to revise red snapper catch levels to be based on the most recent acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations from the SSC and to reduce dead releases of snapper grouper species in response to concerns over red snapper dead releases. The Council directed staff to continue development of the amendment with the following components:

- Action(s) to adjust red snapper catch levels based on SEDAR 73 and the SSC's most recent recommendations.
- Actions to modify fishing gear requirements:
  - Disallow use of electric reels for the recreational sector while fishing for snapper grouper species
  - Require single hook rigs for the recreational sector while fishing for snapper grouper species.

In addition, the Council suggested ways to expand outreach and education to reduce dead releases in the fishery and requested analyses (to be conducted jointly by staff, SERO, and the SEFSC) to inform discussion during the September meeting of how time/area closures could be considered in future management, including:

- Alternative timing of the red snapper recreational season
- A maximum depth limit for the recreational red snapper season
- Wave closures for the private recreational sector based on "hot spot" analysis and aligning with the existing spawning closure for shallow water groupers.

#### *Gag (Amendment 53)*

The Council selected preferred alternatives for several actions and provided additional direction to staff:

- Commercial trip limit – Direct staff to develop alternatives for a phased-in commercial trip limit increase through the rebuilding plan from 300 to 1,000 pounds.
- No change to the duration of the spawning season closure for either sector
- Recreational vessel limit – Direct staff to include additional alternatives to phase-in a vessel limit increase from 2 fish to 6 fish per vessel per day and include alternatives that would exclude the for-hire component from a vessel limit.

The Council is scheduled to approve the amendment for public hearings at the September meeting.

*Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish (Amendment 52)*

The Council approved modification to the need statement and selected preferred alternatives that would:

- Modify the fishing year for the commercial longline component for the golden tilefish fishery to begin on January 15 and retain the January 1 start date for the hook-and-line component
- Modify the recreational accountability measure for golden tilefish to have NMFS announce the end date based on projections of when the recreational ACL would be met. The start date of the recreational fishing season would remain January 1.
- Reduce the recreational bag limit for blueline tilefish to 2 fish per person per day and disallow retention by captain and crew.
- Modify the recreational fishing season to May 1 through June 30 and direct staff to explore whether regional seasons could be considered for blueline tilefish.
- Modify the recreational accountability measure for blueline tilefish in the same manner as for golden tilefish (see above).

The Council approve the amendment for public hearings and directed staff to convene a meeting of golden tilefish commercial longline endorsement holders by December 2022 to discuss alternative ways to manage that component of the fishery.

*Snowy Grouper (Amendment 51)*

The Council acted to:

- Retain the existing commercial trip limit (200 pounds)
- Modify the recreational season to May 1 through June 30

The Council approved the amendment for public hearings.

*Greater Amberjack (Amendment 49)*

The public hearing for this amendment was conducted during the comment session. The Council acted to:

- Retain the recreational minimum size limit at 28 inches
- Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to from 36 inches to 32 inches. Add an alternative for consideration to reduce to 34 inches.
- Retain the current commercial trip limit at 1,200 pounds in Season 1 and modify the trip limit for season 2 to also be 1,200 pounds.
- Prohibit possession of greater amberjack in April each year for both sectors.

**Development of empirical management procedures (MPs) for dolphin**

The SEFSC is planning to begin work on a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for the South Atlantic dolphin fishery. The goal of this project is to develop an index-based management procedure that may provide catch level and management advice that best achieves the multiple operational management objectives of the fishery. The Council directed staff to prioritize the MSE work over development of Regulatory Amendment 3 (see below). Stakeholder meetings

would be held in the fall and staff would present available summary information from those meetings to the Council in December 2022, when the Council would take up discussion of Regulatory Amendment 3 with the added input from stakeholders. The Council requested receiving updates as the MSE progresses.

### **Modifications to the minimum size limit, recreational retention limits, and for-hire captain and crew bag limits for dolphin (Dolphin Wahoo Regulatory Amendment 3)**

Measures in this amendment would extend the applicable geographic range of the minimum size limit, modify recreational retention limits, and remove captain and crew bag limits for dolphin. The Council reviewed an options paper on the amendment and provided guidance on the Purpose and Need statements as well as the range of options to consider in the amendment. The amendment currently considers the following:

- Modifying the applicable range of the minimum size limit for dolphin for both sectors.
- Modifying the recreational bag limit for dolphin, with consideration of different bag limits by mode.
- Modifying the recreational vessel limit for dolphin, including regional options and exempting charter vessels.
- Removing the recreational limit for captain and crew onboard charter vessels, including consideration of regional options

The Council directed staff to conduct scoping for this amendment prior to the December 2022 Council meeting.

### **Citizen Science**

The Council provided the following guidance on the program and projects:

- **Initial Program Evaluation Interview Results** - The Council found the interview findings informative and was supportive of the continuation of this work. NOAA Fisheries and the Council committed to providing funding to contribute to the survey component of this work.
- **FISHstory** -- The Council supported staff pursuing additional funding for the project and exploring ways to identify and archive additional historic for-hire photos in the South Atlantic region.
- **Snowy Grouper Project** - At the March 2022 meeting, the Council provided guidance to work with the Citizen Science Program to explore development of a project working with dealers to gather supplemental commercial snowy grouper length data. Staff presented information summarizing the biological data available through current data collection programs and things to consider if the Council wants to pursue development of a citizen science project working with dealers to gather supplemental length data. Based on the commercial snowy grouper data available through current data collection programs and the resources available, the Council did not support the continued development of this project idea at this time. However, there was support for potentially pursuing it in the future.