

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Update and Liaison Report



Winter 2021

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Beaufort, North Carolina, December 6-10, 2021. The Council meeting began with a closed session to review appointments to advisory panels, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the SSC's Socio-Economic Sub-Panel.

Below is a summary of the Council's actions:

Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology Review

The Council received a presentation on the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) Review. SBRMs are required for every federal fishery management plan. A final rule requiring review of SBRM's every 5 years was published in February 2017. Dr. Genny Nesslage, SSC Chair, presented the SSC's comments and summary feedback on the review. The Council approved a motion indicating the review satisfies the language in the final rule for standardized bycatch reporting for the Council's FMPs.

Exempted Fishing Permits

The Council was briefed on three exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications. One application was submitted by the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) requesting authorization to test non-containment traps in the South Atlantic to harvest lionfish. The second EFP application was submitted by the South Carolina Aquarium requesting authorization to allow harvest of Council-managed species in federal waters. A third request was submitted by Sustainable Seas Technology to test Acoustic Subsea Buoy Retrieval Systems (ASBRS) in the commercial black sea bass pot fishery in federal waters. The Council recommended that NMFS approve the applications.

Atlantic King Mackerel

The Council reviewed public hearing comments for Coastal Migratory Pelagics 34, which addresses catch level adjustments based on SSC recommendations and the recent stock assessment update for Atlantic king mackerel, sector allocations, and management measures. The

Council removed actions related to modification of the minimum size limit from further consideration. The amendment will be considered for formal review in March 2022.

Gulf Cobia

The Council approved all actions in Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 32 to address the overfishing status of Gulf migratory group cobia and approved the amendment for formal secretarial review.

Gulf King Mackerel

Ryan Rindone, Gulf Council staff, presented draft options to be considered in Amendment 33, which proposes modifications to catch limits and sector allocations for Gulf king mackerel based on the results of the SEDAR 38 Update stock assessment. The stock assessment found that Gulf king mackerel was not overfished or undergoing overfishing. The Council will review more detailed analysis for the proposed action and alternatives at an upcoming meeting.

Snapper Grouper Release Mortality Reduction Framework

The Council reviewed Snapper Grouper AP comments on previously recommended measures to reduce dead releases of snapper grouper species. The Council also reviewed a discussion document that outlined previous Council discussions and actions to reduce release mortality of snapper grouper species as well as methods used to reduce discards in the multispecies Pacific Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. Staff were directed to compile information that may support quantifying a reduction in released fish associated with gear, spatial, or seasonal regulations. The Council also directed staff to conduct initial scoping to solicit additional ideas for reducing dead releases. Additionally, the amendment includes an action to adjust the red snapper ABC in the South Atlantic.

Red Snapper Response and Holistic Management Approach

The Council reviewed a proposal to develop a management strategy evaluation for the snapper grouper fishery. The Council will contract with an external analyst to develop the model and work through their advisory panel, SSC, and Council to develop quantifiable objectives and evaluation metrics for the analysis. The project is planned to take two years to develop with the final product presented to the Council in June 2024.

Snowy Grouper

The Council reviewed Snapper Grouper AP comments and recommendations and an options paper on Snapper Grouper Amendment 51, addressing catch levels, allocations, and management measures for snowy grouper. The Council accepted changes to the options paper since their first review in September and instructed staff to gather input on the co-catch of snowy grouper and blueline tilefish. Amendment 51 was approved for scoping.

Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish

The Council reviewed Snapper Grouper AP comments and recommendations and an options paper on Snapper Grouper Amendment 52, addressing catch levels and management measures for golden tilefish. The Council recommended the amendment also include actions for different start dates for commercial golden tilefish hook and line and long line seasons and actions to revise golden tilefish accountability measures. The Council voted to include actions to adjust the

recreational bag limit for blueline tilefish and modify blueline tilefish recreational accountability measures. Amendment 52, including golden tilefish and blueline tilefish, measures was approved for scoping.

Gag

The Council reviewed Snapper Grouper AP comments and recommendations and an options paper on Snapper Grouper Amendment 53, which establishes a rebuilding plan and addresses catch levels, allocations, and management measures for gag grouper. The Council requested a new set of rebuilding projections be reviewed by the SSC in February. The resulting probability of rebuilding and catch level recommendations will be reviewed at the March Council meeting. The Council gave direction to staff to incorporate an additional allocation strategy, modifications to commercial and recreational management measures, and accountability measures. Amendment 53 was approved for scoping.

Greater Amberjack

The Council modified some of the alternatives and selected preferred alternatives for actions addressing sector allocations, sector minimum size limits, and removal of annual catch targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The Council directed further development of alternatives considered for the seasonal commercial trip limits and April spawning closure. The amendment will be considered for public hearings in March 2022.

Yellowtail Snapper

The Council reviewed feedback from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and directed staff to suspend work on this amendment and request that FWC conduct an update to the assessment to incorporate three additional years of data and a constant catch projection to set an ABC for the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper stock.

Red Porgy

The Council approved all actions in Snapper Grouper Amendment 50 to address the overfishing and overfished status of red porgy in the South Atlantic and reviewed rationale for each action. The amendment will be considered for formal review in March 2022.

SEDAR

The Council reviewed its approval process for SEDAR projects and adjusted the timing of SEDAR Committee meetings and approvals to account for the timing of submission for statements of work for operational assessments. The Council then reviewed and approved terms of reference for SEDAR 68 (Scamp) Operational Assessment, SEDAR 82 (Gray Triggerfish) Research Track Assessment, SEDAR 83 (Vermilion Snapper) Operational Assessment, SEDAR 86 (Red Grouper) Operational Assessment as well as a statement of work for a 2024 Golden Tilefish Operational Assessment.

Citizen Science

The Council reviewed, edited, and adopted the updated citizen science research priorities. These priorities are used to guide the projects the Citizen Science Program supports or pursues. They are also shared with partners throughout the region to encourage collaboration and the development of projects that address the identified priorities.

Outreach and Communications

The Council was briefed on the Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel Report, which included recommendations and considerations for the Council's presence on social media. The Council will likely discuss social media guidelines, as well as goals and objectives of a social media strategy, at future meetings. In addition, the Council received an update on the Reef Fish Sea Grant Fellowship and a preliminary demo of the new website.