

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

*Ad Hoc Committee on Improving Snapper Grouper Private Recreational Catch Estimates
aka Private Recreational Reporting Working Group*

Working Group Summary and Preliminary Recommendations

Workgroup Goal

Develop recommendations for consideration by the Council for coordinated state-federal data collection and permitting programs to improve estimates of catch and effort for private recreational snapper grouper fishing activities.

Workgroup Members

Spud Woodward, SAFMC Member, Chair
Carolyn Belcher, SAFMC Member
Chester Brewer, SAFMC Member
Jessica McCawley, SAFMC Member
MRIP: Richard Cody
SERO: Mike Larkin
SEFSC: Erik Williams
ACCSP: Geoff White
FL: Bev Sauls, Luiz Barbieri
SC: Amy Dukes
NC: Dee Lupton/Stephanie McInerney/Brandi Salmon

Meeting 1: February 17, 2021

Presentations

- FL FWC Reef Fish Survey
- MRIP Rare Event Working Group

Actions

- Finalized Goal and Objectives
- Provided guidance and requests for future meetings

Meeting 2: May 26, 2021

Presentations

- MAFMC Recreational Tilefish Reporting
- HMS Private Recreational Reporting
- MRIP Large Pelagics Survey (LPS)

Actions

- Discussed measures of success and the need for compatibility across programs
- Considered potential challenges to mandatory reporting
- Provided guidance and requests for future meetings

Meeting 3: December 1, 2021

Presentations

- Overviews of state permits and permitting processes
- HMS general recreational permit

Actions

- Compared state programs and discussed federal vs state permitting options
- Provided guidance and requests for future meetings

Meeting 4: February 9, 2021

Actions

- Developed recommendations for Council consideration.

Workgroup Recommendations

1. Develop a Federal permit for the snapper grouper recreational fishery

Permits alone will not resolve the data issues that led the Council to create this workgroup. However, permits have the potential to create data collection opportunities that exceed the capabilities of current monitoring efforts and can lead to improved catch and effort estimates.

The current recreational saltwater license system used by NC, SC, and GA does not adequately identify participants in the snapper grouper fishery. The Florida Reef Fish Survey does identify those who target/harvest a subset of species within the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery.

The purpose of a recreational permit for snapper grouper fishing is to resolve this issue and identify the universe of private anglers who target snapper grouper species. The lack of an accurate universe or sampling frame of snapper grouper fishery participants is an acknowledged impediment to improving catch and effort estimates provided by existing surveys. The sampling frame may also support entirely new survey efforts.

A federal permit is considered an appropriate solution for this federal fishery. In addition, the Council likely does not have any authority to require states to create a permit.

The Council will need to evaluate both VESSEL and INDIVIDUAL permitting options.

2. Develop a data collection program that uses the universe of anglers provided by the recreational permit to support improvements in recreational data collection that will provide improved catch and effort estimates.

A permit-based sampling frame can support changes in data collection efforts ranging from improvements in efficiency within the existing MRIP surveys to completely new surveys designed specifically for snapper grouper fishing by private recreational anglers.

Resources will be factor in any efforts to create new or significantly modify existing surveys. Because one size will not fit all in the diverse snapper grouper fishery, Council should consider multiple data collection approaches to meet management and assessment data needs across the many species of the complex. This may include changes in current surveys, recommendations for new surveys, and both census and survey approaches. For example, some species are adequately sampled by current survey efforts and will benefit from the improvements a defined sample frame provides, while others, such as those considered “rare events” in the current surveys, may require census approaches or new, dedicated survey efforts.

Council should evaluate the ability of existing survey programs to provide reliable catch estimates when developing data collection recommendations. Council should consider establishing performance targets (ie, target PSE values) for data collection to evaluate current programs and alternatives for possible changes or new programs. g

3. Create a snapper grouper permit and reporting technical advisory panel

- Provide recommendations and advice on technical aspects of permitting and data collection alternatives.
- Guide pilot studies that likely will be necessary to support both existing survey changes and potential new survey approaches.
- Provide advice on calibration between current data collection efforts and any changes resulting from Council actions.
- Membership should include state and federal agency personnel with survey and fishery experience as well as researchers experienced in survey theory and design.
- This group would not replace the Snapper Grouper AP nor infringe upon the APs role of providing advice from the fishery.

4. Other recommendations and considerations

- Given the purpose of the permit is to support new or revised surveys to improve catch and effort estimates, and that decisions made regarding the permit will directly affect opportunities for existing survey improvements and new surveys, Council will need to consider permit alternatives and data collection needs in a coordinated manner.
- Managing expectations for both the fishing community and managers will be important to success of this effort.
- Permitting and data collection actions are often controversial. The workgroup developed the following list of factors considered important to success:
 - Establish realistic expectations
 - Clearly define goals and objectives
 - Clearly define measures of success and milestones for indicating data improvement
 - Consider flexibility, timeliness, and adaptability to future situations
 - Foster effective state-state and state-federal coordination
 - Strive for compatible survey methods across the area of interest (South Atlantic, for some stocks this will include the Gulf of Mexico and Greater Atlantic)
 - Accurate angler universe identification (sampling frame); minimize over-subscription (only actual participants in the frame)
 - Outreach
 - Cooperation and compatibility with existing surveys (i.e., MRIP, FWC Reef Fish)
- Once a permit is in place that provides an accurate sampling frame, the primary impediment to improving catch and effort estimates is the financial costs of new and improved surveys.

- Council should explore costs of other programs such as HMS permits and the LPS, FWC's Reef Fish Survey, MAFMC's tilefish survey.
- Considerable cost savings are expected from integrating new efforts with existing surveys.

5. Research Recommendations

- MRIP, SEFSC, or the Rare Event Estimation Working group conduct a modeling exercise in which data and estimates for a well-estimated species (i.e., one with acceptable PSE levels) are degraded to mimic rare event circumstances to more thoroughly evaluate alternative estimation methods.
- Identify methods to collect reliable and representative information on discarded fish.
- Quantify and describe changes in fishing power (i.e., catchability or effective effort) that have occurred since passage of the MSA in 1976.
- Census and random survey options should be explored through pilot studies. Due to a combination of low PSEs and ACLs, the deepwater complex should be considered for evaluating census reporting.
- Require side by side and overlapping survey efforts to support calibration of survey changes or new surveys to current sampling efforts.
- Monitor the impacts of increased APAIS sampling, that began in 2021, on precision and resolution of MRIP estimates.
- Evaluate the extent to which a defined universe of snapper grouper anglers could be used to improve estimates of discarded fish.