

**Reef Fish Committee
Action Guide and Next Steps for Tab B**

Agenda Item IV: Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment 58: Modifications to Shallow-water Grouper and Deep-water Grouper Management Measures

Action: Presentation, discussion, and feedback

Council input and next steps: Council staff will present updated management options for modifying the shallow-water grouper (SWG) and deep-water grouper (DWG) complexes, in light of recent stock assessment advice. Between the March and May 2023 SSC meetings, the SSC made separate OFL and ABC recommendations for scamp and yellowmouth grouper, and black and yellowfin grouper, respectively, all of which are components of the SWG complex. In February 2024, the SSC re-specified its OFL and ABC recommendations for black grouper and yellowfin grouper, correcting an error in the landings provided to the SSC at its May 2023 meeting. These four species are currently managed under a single annual catch limit (ACL), with a commercial ACL and annual catch target (ACT) specified to allow for the functioning of the SWG component of the commercial Grouper-Tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. Because OFLs and ABCs were specified explicitly for the aforementioned pairs of groupers, these species can no longer be managed under a single complex with one quota because of the possibility of overfishing occurring on either pair. For SWG, Council staff will present revised actions for specifying status determination criteria, SWG complex structure, IFQ share allocation, catch limits, and sector allocation.

Council staff will also present management options for DWG, including catch limits and flexibility measures between the SWG and DWG complexes designed to reduce commercial discards in the IFQ program. DWG catch limits were updated by the SSC following its review of the SEDAR 85 stock assessment for yellowedge grouper which, along with snowy grouper, warsaw grouper, and speckled hind, is a component of the DWG complex. The SSC recommended managing these four DWG species together because of the use of similar data units and to reduce dead discards. The Committee should discuss the range of actions and alternatives presented, suggest revisions to (or removal of) any presented management alternatives, and determine next steps for the document.

Agenda Item V: Discussion: Vision Statement for the Individual Fishing Quota Programs

Action: Discussion and feedback

Council input and next steps: Staff will present the draft vision for the red snapper and grouper/tilefish individual fishing quota programs proposed by the Council during its June 2024 meeting and suggest discussion points that may be considered by the Committee. The Committee should review the information presented, ask questions, and propose a revised vision for the IFQ programs. The Committee could recommend the Council approve a vision for the IFQ programs, as needed.

Agenda Item VI: Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment 59: Requirements for Participation in Individual Fishing Quota Programs

Action: Presentation, discussion, and feedback

Council input and next steps: Staff will give a presentation on Reef Fish Amendment 59, an amendment addressing participation requirements in the red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ programs. Participation requirements include the ownership of valid or renewable commercial reef fish permits and requirements to land preset percentages of their annual allocations. The presentation will discuss the diverse types of participants in the IFQ programs and the consequences of selecting various combinations of permit and activity requirements on IFQ participants. The Committee should review the information presented, make recommendations, and discuss next steps, as needed.

Agenda Item VII: Draft Options: Federal For-hire Buffer and Fishing Season for Red Snapper

Action: Discussion and recommendations

Council input and next steps: This framework action is being developed in response to public comment received by the Council during 2024, which indicated a desire to reduce the buffer between the federal for-hire component of the recreational sector’s annual catch limit (ACL) and annual catch target (ACT) for red snapper. This buffer is currently set at 9%. Presently, the federal for-hire fishing season, which opens on June 1, is set by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) based on landings projections from previous fishing years, and the projected fishing year is set to close when the federal for-hire ACT is projected to be met. If, after red snapper landings from the federal for-hire component are estimated, the ACT has not been met, the Regional Administrator for NMFS may reopen the fishing season later in the fishing year to allow the federal for-hire component to reach its ACT. In April 2024, the Council directed staff to re-evaluate the for-hire buffer for red snapper, and the for-hire fishing season. Council staff will present draft options for both of these actions, and a season duration analysis to show how these actions interact. The Committee should review the information presented, make any modifications to the options presented, and provide any additional direction to staff as appropriate. Staff will plan to bring this document back to the Council for final action in November 2024.

Agenda Item VIII: Contract Outcomes: *Regional and Sector-Specific Gulf of Mexico Gray Triggerfish Age, Growth, and Age-length Key Estimation Derived from Otolith-based Ageing*

Action: Presentation and discussion

Council input and next steps: Dr. Will Patterson (University of Florida, Standing SSC) will review results of the research contracted by the Council to assess ageing error in Gulf gray triggerfish. The Council funded this work in light of its critical importance for completing a new stock assessment on Gulf gray triggerfish schedule for 2025. The last stock assessment was terminated prior to completion due to irreconcilable data issues; among these was an outstanding issue related to differences in ages between using otoliths and dorsal spines. The specific objectives of the Council’s contracted study were to 1) sample gray triggerfish from commercial fisheries landings in the southeastern, northeastern, and western Gulf of Mexico; 2) estimate fish age via opaque zone counts in sagittal otoliths; 3) validate otolith-derived age estimates for a subset of samples (n = 30) randomly selected from each region via application of the bomb 14C chronometer to eye lens core (age-0 portion) 14C values; 4) test for differences in sex-specific size-at-age and growth estimates among regions and between commercial and previously sampled eastern Gulf of Mexico recreationally harvested fish; and 5) compute age-length keys by sex, and potentially by region and fishery sector pending results under objective 4. The SSC representative will then characterize the SSC’s discussions on the contracted work. The Committee should review objectives of the contract and the results and ask questions of Dr. Patterson, and make recommendations to the Council as appropriate.

Agenda Item IX: Summary of the July 2024 SSC Meeting

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: The SSC representative will review research presented to the SSC at its July 2024 meeting. Dr. Challen Hyman (University of South Florida) presented the SSC with recent research on the effects of modifications to the recreational fishing season duration for Gulf gag grouper on fishing effort, harvest, and discards. He described the relationships between these factors and how accounting for them can assist fisheries managers in better aligning fishing seasons with management goals. The Committee should review the information presented by the SSC representative, ask questions, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Agenda Item X: Other Business

Action: Additional items that can be brought up for discussion

Council Input and Next Steps: Additional items may be brought up for discussion by Committee members during the adoption of the agenda, time permitting. If the Committee wishes to pursue action, then action can be scheduled at a future Council meeting.
