

**Reef Fish Advisory Panel Summary  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
Gulf Council Conference Room  
Tampa, Florida  
September 16-17, 2015**

**Reef Fish AP members present:**

Martin Fisher, Chair	Jane Black	Buddy Guindon	Tom Turke
Troy Frady, V. Chair	Jim Clements	Scott Hickman	Ed Walker
Ralph Allen	Jason DeLaCruz	George Huye	James Whitfield
Pam Anderson	F.J. Eicke	Chris Jenkins	Troy Williamson, III*
Patrick Bennett	James Eliason	Mike Thierry	Jim Zurbrick

**Gulf Council Staff:**

Steven Atran  
John Froeschke  
Karen Hoak  
Morgan Kilgour (webinar)  
Ava Lasseter  
Ryan Rindone  
Carrie Simmons

**Council Member:**

Doug Boyd

**NMFS Staff:**

Steve Branstetter  
Sue Gerhart  
Peter Hood  
Rich Malinowski  
Christina Package

**Public:**

Jeff Barger  
Mike Colby  
Bob Gill  
Cathleen Gill  
Sharon McBreen  
Chris McHan  
Tom Wheatley

\* AP member was unable to attend the second day of the meeting. Three AP members could not attend out of 23 AP members.

The Reef Fish AP convened at 8:30 a.m. on September 16-17, 2015. Martin Fisher was elected the Chair and Troy Frady was elected the Vice Chair by acclamation. The meeting summaries of the Reef Fish AP and Red Snapper AP were approved without modifications.

**Public Hearing Draft Amendment 39 – Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper**

Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the regional management document, highlighting the Council’s current preferred alternatives. The AP discussed several actions which built upon one another to establish regional management before beginning to make recommendations.

AP members discussed Action 4, which would modify the federal minimum size limit for red snapper. Following an initial motion which failed to recommend support for the preferred alternative, AP members passed the following modified motion. AP members acknowledged the enforcement issues involved in their recommendation, but wanted to express their support for reducing bycatch and the conservation of the stock.

**By a vote of 18 to 0 and 2 abstentions, the AP recommends in Action 4, to recommend to the Council a 15-inch TL minimum size limit and the retention of all legal fish caught up to the bag limit.**

Returning to Action 1, AP members suggested that a review of the regional management program be required rather than the Council adopting a sunset provision. AP members moved to recommend Preferred Alternative 4 as the AP's preferred, with a substitute motion to make Alternative 1 the preferred. Following failure of the substitute motion, the AP recommended another alternative as preferred. AP members thought that for regional management to succeed, it should pass with a larger majority of Council member support than the simple majority required for other votes.

**By a vote of 10 to 7, the AP recommends that the preferred alternative be Alternative 2.**

**Alternative 2:** Establish a regional management program that delegates some management authority to a state or group of states (regions). ...

AP members discussed the alternatives of Action 2, extensively. Some members expressed concern with state management while others expressed concern with federal management. A couple of AP members expressed concerns relative to Magnuson-Stevens Act section 407(d), which requires the prohibition on further harvest of red snapper by the entire recreational sector when the ACL is reached. It is possible that a particular region's (or component's) landings exceed its portion of the ACL enough to trigger such a closure for the entire recreational sector. It was also noted that Alternative 3 would result in the ACL being divided into 10 regional and component ACLs, making the monitoring of landings more difficult than if the ACL was divided into fewer pieces. After an initial motion to recommend Alternative 4 as preferred, AP members passed the following substitute motion.

**By a vote of 12 to 6, the AP recommends in Action 2, to recommend Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative.**

**Alternative 2: Extend** the separate management of federal for-hire and private angling components of the recreational sector. This amendment would **apply to the private angling component**, only. ...

In Action 3, the AP supported the Council's current preferred alternative and passed the following motion:

**By a unanimous vote, in Action 3, the AP recommends Preferred Alternative 5 as the panel's preferred alternative.**

**Preferred Alternative 5:** Establish five regions representing each Gulf State, which may voluntarily form multistate regions with adjacent states.

For Action 5, AP members discussed various scenarios in which regions may want to close areas of federal waters. AP members noted the problems with enforcing closed areas in federal waters

while state waters are open. Following discussion, the AP passed the following motion after a substitute motion to recommend Preferred Alternative 2 failed.

**By a vote of 14 to 2, the AP recommends in Action 5, that Alternative 1 be the preferred alternative.**

**Alternative 1:** No action – Regions may not establish closed areas in federal waters adjacent to their region.

AP members discussed Action 6 that addresses allocating the red snapper recreational quota among the regions. An initial motion to recommend Alternative 7 as preferred failed. AP members passed a subsequent motion, recommending the Council’s current preferred alternatives for the action, as follows:

**By a vote of 18 to 0 and 1 abstention, the AP recommends in Action 6, to recommend Preferred Alternatives 5 and 6 as the preferred alternatives.**

**Preferred Alternative 5:** Apportion the recreational sector ACL (or component ACLs) among the regions selected in Action 3 based on **50%** of average historical landings for the years **1986-2013** and **50%** of average historical landings for the years **2006-2013**.

**Preferred Alternative 6:** In calculating regional apportionments, exclude from the selected time series:

**Preferred Option a:** 2006 landings

**Preferred Option b:** 2010 landings

AP members discussed the accountability measures provided in Action 7. Staff noted that these alternatives may be reworked such that each alternative could apply to any alternative selected in Action 2. Some AP members asked about the various State’s new data collection programs for red snapper and how and when those could be implemented and replace MRIP. Staff stated these programs would need to run side by side for a period of time and then be certified, but eventually State red snapper data collection programs were expected to replace MRIP. Further, improved data collection programs could eventually reduce the size of the buffer on regional ACLs. After an initial motion recommending the Council’s current Preferred Alternative 2, AP members offered the following substitute motion. AP members noted their rationale was to have the overage adjustment apply to any group’s ACL that is exceeded and to not penalize any group (region or component) that does not exceed its ACL.

**By a vote of 15 to 4, the AP recommends in Action 7, to recommend adopting Alternative 4 as the preferred alternative.**

**Alternative 4:** While red snapper are overfished ..., if the combined recreational landings exceed the recreational sector ACL, in the following year reduce the **component ACLs** by the full amount of a component’s ACL overage; ... [and] reduce the **regional ACL** of any region that exceeded its regional ACL by the amount of the region’s ACL overage in the prior fishing year. ...

## Review of Gray Triggerfish SEDAR 43 Stock Assessment

The SEDAR 43 gray triggerfish assessment was conducted as a standard assessment. Staff summarized the differences between a benchmark, standard, and update assessment. A benchmark assessment is used the first time a stock is assessed or when a new model is used. It consists of three workshops (Data, Assessment, and Review) and is peer-reviewed by a panel that includes reviewers from the Center for Independent Experts. A standard assessment is used when the same model is being used, but new data sources are available or there are major changes to the inputs. It uses a combined Data/Assessment workshop, and the peer review is conducted by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Update assessments do not permit any changes to the model, except for adding the most recent years of data to the data streams. Update assessments are also peer reviewed by the SSC.

Staff reviewed the gray triggerfish assessment and the recommendations and motions made by the SSC. The assessment indicated that the gray triggerfish spawning stock biomass has continued to decline even though the fishing mortality rate has been below the maximum fishing mortality threshold for nearly a decade. The SSC noted concerns with several of the assumptions made in the assessment, and felt it was not useful for management advice. However, the assessment methodologically was done correctly and thus was accepted as the best available science. Some AP members then questioned if the assessment was considered best available science because it was the only available science. Staff noted that the motion made by the SSC was split, 12 to 8, because some members felt it was not possible to give management advice based on the assessment. Therefore, the SSC recommended maintaining the existing 305,300-lb ww ABC until a new benchmark assessment is conducted. However, it was noted that, even if the directed fishery is closed completely, the stock will not recover by the end of the 10-year rebuilding period in 2017.

Some AP members suggested that landings in the western Gulf were low in comparison to the eastern Gulf, not only because the center of abundance is in the east, but also because fishers in the west typically do not want gray triggerfish. Other AP members observed that, while gray triggerfish may have disappeared for a few years, in recent years they have become more abundant.

AP members suggested that the relationship between stock success and the increasing abundance of red snapper and lionfish needs to be evaluated. In addition, gray triggerfish are associated with *Sargassum* during their first 4 to 7 months of life, and it was suggested that measurements of *Sargassum* coverage be collected and added to the model. Staff responded that this was being looked at for the next assessment. The circle hook requirement in 2008 made it more difficult to catch gray triggerfish, and AP members questioned if this had been taken into consideration. Staff replied that the assessment document stated that analysis of unpublished data indicated the implementation of circle hook regulations resulted in a reduction in the catchability of gray triggerfish by a factor of 2.14. Panel members suggested that the change in the minimum size limit in 2008 from 12 inches total length to 14 inches fork length was a bigger change than it appears due to filaments in the tail. AP members suggested that other factors such as the 2010 BP oil spill should be evaluated to see if there was any impact on the stock.

**By a vote of 16 to 1 the AP requests further analysis on impacts on gray triggerfish by red snapper and lionfish, the BP spill, and the abundance of *Sargassum*, and to add additional information to the standard assessment in order for the SSC to make a decision on the OFL and ABC.**

An AP member suggested that management should move toward a full retention policy for gray triggerfish. As a first step the AP suggested gray triggerfish be included in the Amendment 33 reef fish IFQ program. This would allow a more accurate count of the commercial catch. Staff noted that gray triggerfish were on the list of potential species to be included in the Amendment 33 IFQ document, but development of the amendment had been postponed by the Council in April 2012.

**By a vote of 16 to 1 and 1 abstention, the AP recommends that the Council revisit Amendment 33 (IFQ) to include gray triggerfish in the fishery management plan.**

**By a vote of 13 to 2 and 3 abstentions, the AP recommends that the Council untable Amendment 33 and move it forward.**

AP members noted that the commercial sector did not reach its quota in 2014 and was currently below 50% of its quota as of September 2015. They thought that the commercial trip limit of 12 gray triggerfish may be too restrictive, because they are discarding fish. AP members suggested the Council should consider increasing the commercial trip limit to allow the commercial sector to fill its quota each year.

**By a vote of 11 to 2 with 2 abstentions, the AP recommends to the Council analysis be done to optimize maximum yield for the commercial industry for gray triggerfish to reach quota via increase in bag limit (trip limit).**

For the recreational sector, which has exceeded its quota and the fishing season has closed early in recent years, AP members suggested reducing the bag limit to 1 fish to help extend the season and increase fishing opportunities. Initially, some AP members suggested combining the bag limit decrease with an increase in the recreational minimum size limit to 15 inches FL, but the size limit increase was withdrawn after other AP member's raised concerns about the effect on discard mortality.

**By a vote of 15 to 1, the AP recommends that for gray triggerfish, in the recreational fishery, there be a 1 fish bag limit, and a 14 inch FL minimum size limit, to maximize yield for the recreational fishery.**

Under Other Business, AP members expressed concern that the Council might reduce the gray triggerfish stock-ACL below its current level. Given their observations that the stock seems to be in greater abundance in recent years, they passed the following motion.

**By a unanimous vote the AP recommends to the Council to maintain the SSC's recommendation for the TAC for gray triggerfish at 305,300 lbs ww.**

## **Public Hearing Draft – Joint Amendment to Require Electronic Reporting for Charter Vessels and Headboats**

The Reef Fish AP reviewed the Modifications to Charter Vessel and Headboat Reporting Requirements document including the current preferred alternatives for the three actions. The AP reviewed Action 1 changes to charter vessel reporting requirements. There was some discussion that current reporting requirements are adequate for management needs; however, the majority of the AP concurred that improvements in data timeliness and accuracy afforded by electronic reporting would offset any potential cost and convenience concerns. Electronic, real-time reporting has been used successfully in commercial fisheries and for-hire reporting pilot programs. Similar results are expected for federally permitted Gulf charter vessels.

**By a vote of 16 to 3 with one abstention, the AP recommends in Action 1 that Alternative 4 be the preferred alternative:**

**Gulf Preferred Alternative 4.** Require that federally permitted charter vessels submit fishing records to the SRD for each trip via electronic reporting (via NMFS approved hardware/software) prior to arriving at the dock.

Trip-level reporting as proposed in Gulf Preferred Alternative 4 would allow improved validation routines and reduce recall bias. This is expected to improve accuracy and confidence in these data, thereby facilitating their use in science and management.

The AP also discussed Action 2 that includes alternatives to change the reporting frequency for federally permitted headboats. Electronic reporting has previously been implemented for headboats that report through the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey. However, electronic reporting is weekly with a week long delay between the end of the fishing week and report submission. The current Gulf Preferred Alternative 4 would require headboats to report each trip electronically, prior to arriving at the dock. The rationale and expected benefits from Alternative 4 are the same as those discussed for Action 1 (charter vessels).

**By a vote of 17 to 3, the AP recommends adopting the preferred alternative in Action 2, Gulf Preferred Alternative 4, as the preferred.**

**Gulf Preferred Alternative 4.** Require that headboats submit fishing records to the SRD for each trip via electronic reporting (via NMFS approved hardware/software) prior to arriving at the dock.

The AP reviewed Action 3 that considers alternatives to require vessel or catch location reporting. If selected as part of the For-Hire survey, charter vessels are required to report area fished (inshore, state, or federal waters). Headboats participating in the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey are required to report latitude and longitude of area fished (degrees and minutes only; within 1 nm<sup>2</sup> area). Some AP members felt this reporting requirement is adequate for science and management and that additional requirements could be costly and burdensome. However, concerns about non-compliance and potential negative effects on all participants in the fishery were also discussed. A motion was offered to retain Alternative 1 with the additional

modification to require vessel monitoring systems (VMS) on vessels found in violation of regulations in a closed or protected area; however, after some discussion the following substitute motion was passed:

**By a vote of 16 to 2, the AP recommends in Action 3, to adopt Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative.**

**Gulf Preferred Alternative 2.** Require federally permitted for-hire vessels to use a NMFS approved electronic device that automatically records vessel location at specified time intervals for later transmission:

**Gulf Preferred Sub-Alternative 2a.** In the Gulf (headboat)

**Gulf Preferred Sub-Alternative 2b.** In the Gulf (charter vessel)

Staff also noted that additional information regarding this program is necessary regarding administration, timing, costs, and integration of new data collection streams with historical data. This information is being requested from NMFS and may be discussed with the Data Collection AP after further development of the document.

The AP also discussed that the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils have different preferences for reporting in their respective regions. In contrast to the Gulf, the South Atlantic favors weekly reporting similar to the current headboat reporting requirements for both headboats and charter vessels. The AP thought weekly reporting would not realize the benefits of timeliness, validation protocols, and data accuracy that were necessary to best manage the Gulf for-hire industry. To avoid any delays in implementation of an improved data collection program, the AP recommended splitting the document into separate Gulf and South Atlantic documents.

**By a vote of 17 to 2, the AP recommends that the Council proceed independently from the South Atlantic on the Joint S. Atlantic/Gulf For-Hire Electronic Reporting Requirements, and move forward with a Gulf only document.**

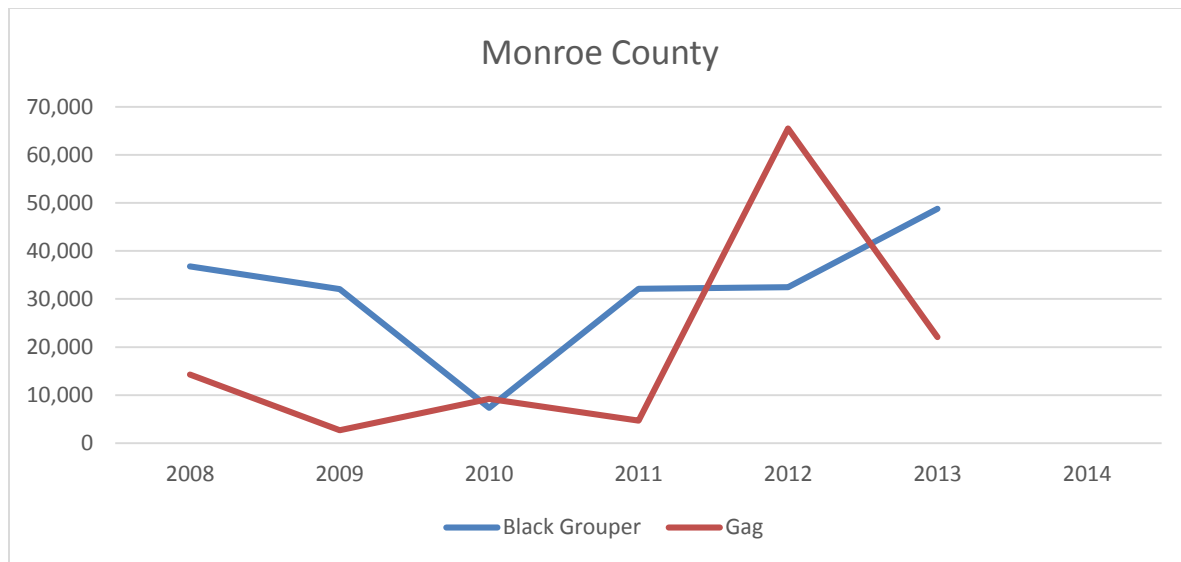
## **Options Paper – Framework Action to set Gag Recreational Season and Gag and Black Grouper Minimum Size Limits**

Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the gag framework action options paper. Regarding Action 1, gag minimum size limit, and Action 2, black grouper minimum size limits several AP members stated that while they were not opposed to increasing the size limit to 24 inches total length (TL) because only about 1% of gag landings in the Gulf occur in Monroe County (Table 1). The AP thought that there was not enough gag caught in that area to justify changing the size limit, affecting the majority of Gulf anglers, for the sake of consistency with South Atlantic regulations. Staff pointed out that while the percentage of total gag caught may be low, on a poundage basis the amount of gag landed in Monroe County was comparable to the amount of black grouper landed (Figure 1).

**Table 1.** Percentage of gag recreational landings made in each region of the Gulf coast of Florida out of all recreational landings of gag. MRIP landings of gag are counted as South Atlantic landings.

<b>% of Gag Recreational Landings by Florida Region</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Monroe County	0.3%	0.1%	0.4%	0.4%	5.9%	1.6%
Panhandle	21.4%	25.0%	17.7%	20.1%	24.7%	18.2%
West Central	78.3%	74.9%	81.9%	79.6%	69.4%	80.2%

Source: NMFS-SERO.



**Figure 1.** Pounds of gag and black grouper recreational landings in Monroe County 2008-2013. Source: NMFS-SERO

AP members asked how a size limit increase would affect discard mortality. One member expressed concern that it would be inconsistent to have previously recommended a precautionary approach to setting the ACL, while at the same time recommending an action that might increase discard mortality. Staff noted that the overall recreational gag release mortality was estimated at 14%, although that varied by depth. Staff also noted that it only took a 22 inch TL gag about six months to grow to 24 inches TL.

**By a vote of 18 to 2, the AP recommends in Action 1, to adopt Preferred Alternative 2 as the AP’s preferred.**

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Set the recreational minimum size limit for gag at 24 inches TL.

**By unanimous vote, the AP recommends in Action 2, to adopt Preferred Alternative 2 as the AP’s preferred.**

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Set the recreational minimum size limit for black grouper at 24 inches TL.



For Action 3, AP members from southwest Florida indicated that a winter fishery, November to March, was the best time for them, particularly if it included the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. With respect to the options in Alternatives 3 and 4 on how to handle the February-March closed season in waters beyond 20 fathoms, one AP member suggested that if an effort validation system was in effect, it would provide more accurate information on how much recreational effort occurs beyond 20 fathoms. The AP also discussed the number of estimated fishing days, with the increase in minimum size limit and selection of Alternative 4, Option c, the recreational sector is expected to have 306 fishing days.

**By unanimous vote, the AP recommends in Action 3, Preferred Alternative 2 with Alternative 4, Option 4(c) as the Preferred Alternatives.**

**Preferred Alternative 2:** Remove the December 3-31 fixed closed season. The recreational gag season will remain open through the end of the year or until a projection that the ACL will be reached sooner<sup>1</sup>. Note Alternative 3 or 4 may also be selected in combination with this alternative.

**Alternative 4:** Remove the January through June gag seasonal closure. Set an opening date for the recreational gag season such that the ACL is projected to be reached on or after December 31 (based on the 2016 ACL).

**Option 4c.** Open January 1 through 31, close February 1 through March 31 to recreational harvest of gag in all federal waters, and re-open on the date such that the 2016 ACL is projected to be reached on or after December 31.

AP members expressed concern about the inequity of having a 24 inch TL recreational minimum size limit for gag, while the commercial minimum size limit is 22 inches TL. Staff noted that the commercial size limit had recently been reduced from 24 to 22 inches TL, because the commercial sector fished in deeper waters where discard mortality was greater. However, a panel member responded that majority of gag beyond 20 fathoms are larger than 24 inches TL and the commercial sector catches mostly larger fish. Although commercial size limits are not part of this framework action, AP members thought that the commercial and recreational sectors should have a consistent size limit.

**By unanimous vote, the AP recommends in the event that the recreational minimum size limit is raised to 24 inches TL, then the AP recommends to the Council, by framework action, to increase the commercial minimum size limit of gag to 24" TL.**

### **Draft Framework Action – Modify Gear Restrictions for Yellowtail Snapper**

Staff presented the framework action to modify gear restrictions for yellowtail snapper. Gulf anglers are required to use circle hooks when catching reef fish with natural bait. The same is true for South Atlantic anglers, but only north of 28° 0' North latitude. Yellowtail snapper in the southeastern US are harvested almost exclusively in south Florida by both sectors. Landings in

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<sup>1</sup> The recreational season closing date for gag is normally based on when the date when the ACL is projected to be reached. However, under the accountability measures for shallow-water grouper, if the recreational landings for gag exceed the ACL, then in the following year the season will close based on when the ACT is projected to be reached.

the Gulf are dominated by the commercial sector (over 97%), primarily from west and northwest of the Florida Keys.

AP members noted an increase in the abundance of yellowtail snapper off Texas and Tampa Bay. The method of cane-poling used by south Florida fishermen was not seen as a practical fishing method off Tampa Bay, because the fish further north are typically larger than those landed in the Keys. AP members also stated that they did not think it wise to open the entire Gulf of Mexico up to fishing with j-hooks, especially in light of the documented benefits of circle hooks to certain reef fish species (like red snapper) with respect to post-release mortality. The AP was in agreement that a gear exemption allowing the use of j-hooks by commercial yellowtail snapper fishermen was most appropriate for Monroe County fishermen and provided the following recommendation to the Council.

**By a unanimous vote, the AP recommends that the Council select Alternative 4 as preferred.**

**Alternative 4:** Remove the requirement to use circle hooks when commercial fishing with natural bait for yellowtail snapper south of 25° 23' North latitude on the west coast of Monroe County, Florida south to the Gulf Council jurisdictional boundary.

The AP was informed that Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) may bring up a different boundary line suggestion for this document and for hogfish management. Florida FWC may suggest a line at 25° 09' North latitude around Cape Sable seen as a better, more enforceable boundary line. Generally, the AP thought since this line is further south and the restriction on commercial gear for yellowtail snapper should be limited primarily to Monroe County, this boundary line would also be acceptable.

## **Options Paper – Amendment to Define West Florida Shelf Hogfish Stock, and set ACL and Status Determination Criteria**

Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the hogfish options paper. In Action 1 – Definition of the Management Unit there are currently three alternatives (GMFMC/SAFMC boundary, Shark Point, and Monroe/Collier County line). Florida FWC requested consideration of an additional alternative to place the hogfish management unit boundary at 25° 09' north latitude, just south of Cape Sable. Florida FWC requested this alternative because it is an existing regulatory boundary line for other stocks. Staff noted the stock assessment used the Monroe/Collier County line as the boundary between the Gulf stock and the East Florida/Florida keys stock. AP members stated that they did not want to overlap the healthy Gulf stock with the overfished East Florida/Florida Keys stock, and thought that the Council should accept the science used in the assessment.

**By unanimous vote, the AP recommends to the Council that Action 1, Alternative 3 (Alternative 4 in the Council briefing book<sup>2</sup>) be the preferred alternative.**

**Alternative 3** (4 in the Council briefing book): The hogfish management unit is the west Florida shelf (or Gulf of Mexico) stock of hogfish. The geographical range of this unit is defined as all waters of the Gulf of Mexico north of a line extending west from the Monroe/Collier County line (25° 48' north latitude) to the outer boundary of the EEZ and westward throughout the rest of the Gulf of Mexico.

Action 2 – Define Status Determination Criteria for Hogfish. Staff noted that the Magnuson-Stevens Act and National Standard 1 Guidelines require that stocks have definitions for maximum sustainable yield (MSY) or proxy, maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT), and minimum stock size threshold (MSST). Hogfish currently have a definition for MFMT of  $F_{30\% SPR}$ , but do not have formal definitions for MSY proxy or MSST. The alternatives in this action define MSY, MFMT, and MSST as a group since they are related to each other. The MSST definition contains three options for setting the size of the buffer between MSST and the stock size at the MSY proxy. This mirrors alternatives that are in a separate proposed amendment to define MSST for low natural mortality reef fish stocks and other stocks. AP members thought that the unofficial proxy was the best choice for official status determination criteria because it was based on fishing mortality at 30% SPR.

**By unanimous vote, the AP recommends that the Council adopts Action 2, Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative.**

**Alternative 3:** MSY = equilibrium yield at  $F_{30\% SPR}$   
MFMT =  $F_{30\% SPR}$   
MSST =  
Option a:  $(1-M)*SSB_{30\% SPR}$ , where  $M = 0.179$   
Option b:  $0.75*SSB_{30\% SPR}$   
Option c:  $0.50*SSB_{30\% SPR}$

For the MSST option, AP members thought that the definition should error on the side of caution.

**By unanimous vote, the AP recommends in Action 2, Alternative 3, Option (a) as the preferred option.**

Option a:  $(1-M)*SSB_{30\% SPR}$ , where  $M = 0.179$

Staff noted in Action 3 – Annual Catch Limit for Hogfish, that in addition to a constant fishing mortality ABC, where the ABC declines each year, the Council had requested a constant catch ABC where the ABC would remain fixed for the three years (2016-2018). That constant catch ABC will not be available until January. Staff also noted that one of the alternatives had an

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<sup>2</sup> In the Council briefing book version of the options paper, the Cape Sable alternative has been added, and the alternatives renumbered so that they appear in geographical order from south to north. As a result, Alternative 3 that was recommended by the AP (Monroe/Collier County line) is now Alternative 4.

incorrect value. Consequently, AP members thought that they could not make a recommendation on Action 3 at this time, and asked how urgent it was that this amendment be implemented. Staff responded that the definition of the management unit was a priority so that the South Atlantic Council could establish a rebuilding plan for the East Florida/Florida Keys stock throughout its range. Definition of the status determination criteria is less urgent, but it needs to be done in a full amendment along with the definition of the management unit. Increasing the ACL is not urgent and could be done as a separate framework action once the values for all of the alternatives are known.

**By unanimous vote the AP recommends to the Council that they create a plan amendment to manage hogfish and to establish the geographic boundary line and status determination criteria. In addition, separate Action 3 from the current options paper for hogfish.**

AP members had recommendations for additional management actions that were not in the options paper. One AP member observed that recreational landings of hogfish are increasing while commercial landings have remained steady. He felt that a commercial: recreational allocation is needed.

**By a vote of 16 to 0 with 2 abstentions the AP recommends that the Council divide the Gulf hogfish stock between a commercial allocation and a recreational allocation.**

AP members thought that the current 12 inch FL minimum size limit was too small and should be increased to 14 inch FL. One AP member suggested that 15 inch FL would be preferable, but 14 inches FL was acceptable. Another AP member was concerned that, since the stock is not overfished, fishermen might not support an increase, but other AP members felt that there would be public support<sup>3</sup> for such a size limit increase.

**By unanimous vote the AP recommends that the Council increase the size limit of Gulf hogfish to 14 inch FL for both the commercial and recreational sectors.**

## **Draft Options Paper – Modify Mutton Snapper ACLs and Establish Commercial and Recreational Management Measures**

The AP did not have adequate time to discuss this agenda item.

## **Review of Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC)**

Staff presented the synopsis from the May, 2015 Coral SSC/AP meeting and Council conclusions. The AP discussed potential areas that could be of concern. Pulley Ridge is an area that is used by bottom longliners, and the northwestern Gulf had areas that were of concern. To prevent duplication of effort on areas in the northwestern Gulf, it was recommended that staff work with the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. Staff informed the AP that it was currently analyzing VMS data for inclusion in determining areas that could affect reef

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<sup>3</sup> The SEDAR 37 assessment states that 50% of females are mature between 151.1 to 192.7 mm FL (6 to 7.5 inches FL), and that 50% of females transition to males between 416 to 426 mm FL (16 to 18 inches FL).

fisheries and requested additional information on fisheries that may not be covered by VMS data.

**By a unanimous vote, the AP recommends to the Council that they form a working group of coral scientists, charter, recreational, bottom, and vertical line commercial fishers to identify new and existing coral areas that need boundary revisions.**

A potential charge for the working group was discussed and the AP wanted to “minimize the restriction of access to all the appropriate fisheries by identifying the exact location of important coral structures and limiting the boundaries to the bases of those structures and where critical habitat exist.”

## **South Florida Management Issues Document**

The AP did not have adequate time to discuss this agenda item.

## **Review of SEDAR Schedule**

The AP reviewed the SEDAR Schedule and asked questions about the next red snapper assessment.

## **Other Business**

Out of concern for other reef fish species managed by the Council and their potential competitive and predatory interactions with lionfish, the AP passed the following motion:

**By unanimous vote, the AP requests that the Council address the lionfish issue with video surveys and data collection on the reefs and collection of information from divers for the purpose of determining a way to eradicate or significantly decrease the presence of lionfish on the reefs.**

Out of concerns for the red snapper stock recovery and changes in recreational anglers’ fishing behaviors based on changes in management, the AP passed the following two motions:

**By a vote of 11 to 3 with 2 abstentions, the AP recommends the Council request that the SEFSC run additional red snapper projections using the recalibration methodology out to 2032, using a wider range of reasonable assumptions for selectivity and recreational discard mortality including but not limited to selectivity. Range should include no change, consistent increase, consistent decrease, and fluctuation every 5 years between today and 2032. Recreational discard mortality range should include 0 to 100% in 25% increments. The results of these projections should be made available to the public and reviewed by the SSC. The SSC analysis should then be presented to the Council as soon as possible.**

**By a vote of 11 to 3 the AP recommends that all future Council decisions that are based on recalibrations be made only when all recalibration methods are evaluated and reviewed by the SSC in their entirety.**

The AP Chair explained he would attend the upcoming October Council meeting. Staff would present the summary report and the AP Chair would be available for questions and to provide additional information to the Council as needed. The AP Chair agreed with the staff procedure, but the AP passed the following motion.

**By a vote of 14 to 3 the AP recommends that the Reef Fish AP Chair present the AP's recommendations to the Council at the October meeting.**

**Other motions on – Reef Fish Amendment 39**

**Motion: To table discussion of Action 1 until the end.  
Motion carried**

**Motion: to untable discussion of Action 1.  
Motion carried**

***Motion:** In Action 4, to recommend to the Council Preferred Alternative 3.  
Preferred Alternative 3: Reduce the federal minimum size limit to 15 inches TL.  
Motion failed 9 to 9.*

***Motion:** In Action 1, to recommend the Council adopt alternative 4 as the preferred.  
Preferred Alternative 4: Establish a regional management program in which a state or group of adjacent states (regions) submit proposals to a technical review committee describing the conservation equivalency measures the region will adopt for the management of its portion of the recreational sector ACL. ...*

***Substitute motion:** To recommend Alternative 1 as the preferred alternative.  
Alternative 1: No Action – Retain current federal regulations for management of recreational red snapper in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf).  
Motion failed 6 to 11.*

***Motion:** In Action 2, to recommend Alternative 4 as the preferred alternative.  
Alternative 4: End the separate management of the federal for-hire and private angling components upon implementation of this amendment, and have this amendment apply to the entire recreational sector. The private angling and federal for-hire components would be managed as a single unit by each region under regional ACLs based on the allocation selected in Action 6.  
(Substitute motion carried; thus, no vote taken on this motion.)*

***Substitute motion:** In Action 5, to recommend to the Council that Preferred Alternative 2 be the preferred alternative.  
Preferred Alternative 2: A region may establish closed areas within federal waters adjacent to their region in which the recreational harvest of red snapper is prohibited.  
Motion failed 3 to 14. (Main motion carried, 14 to 2, to recommend Alternative 1.)*

***Motion:** In Action 6, to recommend Alternative 7 as the preferred alternative.*

*Alternative 7: Apportion the recreational sector ACL into eastern and western regional ACLs (or component ACLs) divided approximately at the Mississippi River, based on regional biogeographical differences in the stock used in the stock assessments. (Motion failed 7 to 10.)*

***Motion:*** *In Action 7, to recommend adopting Preferred Alternative 2.*

***Preferred Alternative 2:*** *While red snapper are overfished (based on the most recent Status of U.S. Fisheries Report to Congress), if the combined recreational landings exceed the recreational sector ACL, then reduce in the following year the regional ACL of any region that exceeded its regional ACL by the amount of the region's ACL overage in the prior fishing year. The recreational ACTs will be adjusted to reflect the previously established percent buffer. (Substitute motion carried; thus, no vote taken on this motion.)*

### **Other motions on – Electronic Reporting for Charter Vessels and Headboats**

*Motion: In Action 2, to recommend adopting alternative 1 as the preferred alternative*  
*Motion failed for lack of a second*

*Motion: In Action 3, to adopt alternative 1 as the preferred alternative, with an addition that for those who are found violating regulations in a closed or protected area, a VMS may be a required tool for future participation in the fishery. Alternative 1 (No Action). Charter vessels participating in the For-Hire survey are required to report area fished (inshore, state, or federal waters), if selected as part of the survey. Headboats participating in the SRHS are required to report latitude and longitude of area fished (degrees and minutes only; within 1 nm<sup>2</sup> area). The substitute motion carried for this action.*

The AP adjourned at 12:10 p.m. on September 17<sup>th</sup>.