

Port Meeting Summary

Cape Hatteras, NC

March 20, 2014, 3 p.m.

Due to the small meeting size, workshop participants simply discussed problems and potential solutions in the snapper grouper fishery.

Problems --

- Endorsement programs not necessarily working and are not fair
- Two-for-one commercial permit requirement has allowed the snapper grouper charter and headboat industries to increase but commercial industry is on the decline; by reducing commercial capacity, this actually creates a reallocation to the recreational sector
- Snowy grouper fishery north of Hatteras is different than the fishery in the rest of the area the Council manages; see larger fish in this area; trip limit is limiting for the fishery; there are many more fish available and trip limit should be relaxed
- One-size-fits-all management doesn't work; need regional management
- Science doesn't match what fishermen are seeing on the water; anecdotal information not included in assessments
- No fishery-independent sampling north of Cape Hatteras in areas where participants are fishing; if no data collected from these areas, they shouldn't be managed by the SAFMC; noted that Virginia sets own limits for many of these snapper grouper species where the Council doesn't have jurisdiction
- Fishing seasons that open early in the year (January – March) put NC fishermen at a disadvantage due to weather, proximity, etc.; this timeframe gives FL fishermen an advantage
- Very little snowy grouper data (and other many other snapper grouper species) are available from Hatteras north
- Climate change; many fish species are moving further north and deeper to get to cooler water; fisheries shifting to deeper and more northern waters following movement of fish (examples – croaker, black sea bass, and snowy grouper); management and research/monitoring programs need to adapt to these shifts
- Too many sharks; sharks are affecting snapper grouper fishery in this area
- Fishermen are getting shut out of fisheries because they have to conform to the most restrictive permit; permit agencies (NE and SE specifically mentioned) are not communicating

Solutions --

- Allocate percentage of commercial ACL by gear type
- Discontinue two-for-one commercial snapper grouper permit requirement
- Regional management – consider state by state management (species mentioned – golden tilefish and snowy grouper); if can't do state by state management, create separate regions (NC/SC and GA/FL); NC should not have to deal with Florida problems

- Allow HMS to manage dolphin
- Open all fisheries/seasons April 1 (spawning season closures excluded)
- Find ways to incorporate anecdotal information into science, assessments, and management
- Raise trip limits for snowy grouper and blueline tilefish to allow fishermen to make a feasible trip for these species; multiple suggestions for trip limits were made (see below); participants noted that trip limits need to be low enough so that ACL won't be met too quickly and season will close (*are these all suggestions for bandit gear only?*)
 - 300 lb snowy grouper; 1,400 lb blueline tilefish
 - 200 lb snowy grouper; 1,500 lb blueline tilefish
 - 200 lb snowy grouper; 2,000 lb blueline tilefish
- Revisit regulations on permits (gear restrictions, etc.) to see how they affecting fishermen; identify where there are restrictive regulations
- Improve communication and coordination between permitting agencies
- Individual suggested having commercial fishermen choose what type of gear they will use annually; would be restricted to that gear type for the year; would be allowed to switch gears on an annual (or another specified timeframe) basis
- Open blueline tilefish longline fishery in July (after dolphin fishing is winding down)

Additional comments --

- Snapper grouper stocks are in good shape in Hatteras area; incredible amount of fish in this area (red snapper, gray triggerfish, snowy grouper, golden tilefish, etc); easy to catch big snowy grouper and golden tilefish; think trip limits for these species should be relaxed; did mention that black sea bass were not as abundant as they used to be in this area – may be due to sharks or tuna
- Deepwater snapper grouper complex are in great shape in the Hatteras area
- Assessments and management need to account for what happens when a stock rebuilds and it affects other species; specifically mention that shark stocks are rebuilding and are likely affecting snapper grouper species
- During limited red snapper seasons most of recreational NC catch is coming from Hatteras area; should be shown through NCDMF's rack program
- Shallow water groupers are not as abundant in Hatteras area
- Management needs to consider cost to fishermen for new regulations (example – video monitoring for tuna fishery in proposed HMS Amendment; if passes will be very costly for fishermen)