



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
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Richard B. Robins, Jr., Chairman | Lee G. Anderson, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 25, 2015

TO: Council

FROM: Jason Didden *JDD*

SUBJECT: Blueline Tilefish Amendment

A Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) has been formed to develop the amendment. Input from the Council in August 2015 and preliminary discussions with NMFS Regional Office (GARFO) staff have led Council staff to develop a preliminary suite of alternatives described in this tab. Pending Council review and input, staff will build out the alternatives in an environmental analysis document.

South-Atlantic Update

Blueline tilefish were on the September South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Snapper-Grouper Committee agenda, and relevant excerpts of the summary from that meeting and a preceding SSC meeting have been posted at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/october-2015>. The SAFMC's SSC has provided an updated blueline tilefish ABC (224,100 lbs. whole weight for 2016-2017) and the SAFMC is moving forward with a framework action to use that ABC. Their SSC did not accept updated projections but concluded that "the assessment estimates of reference points (BMSY, FMSY) based on historic stock production remain to be the best scientific information available and can be used for management advice." Given this, presumably the MAFMC SSC's findings would still hold that SEDAR 32's results are not sufficient for management off the Mid-Atlantic. The South Atlantic Council would continue to specify an ACL for its area of jurisdiction only, which essentially allocates a portion of their ABC to the Mid-Atlantic, and landings from the Mid-Atlantic (VA and north) have accounted for 4%-22% of total blueline tilefish landings depending on the years considered. The

SAFMC's framework action also considers modifications to commercial and recreational trip/possession limits.

Coastwide Blueline Tilefish Sampling Update

The sampling program being run by the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center (on industry vessels) is also moving forward, with contracts having been sent out to participating fishermen. The survey will occur from late September 2015 through October 31, 2015 from the Florida Keys through Norfolk Canyon from 250 feet to deeper than 750 feet. The core objective of this work is to generate life-history data for blueline tilefish, but they may be able to make some inferences about relative CPUE in the various survey areas. Unfortunately the fisherman who had planned to do the Hudson Canyon sampling backed out to do other quota/time-limited golden tilefish fishing. He is still providing incidentally-caught blueline tilefish samples to the scientists so while the current plans do not provide for targeted blueline fishing in Hudson Canyon, the scientists believe they will still have sufficient samples for most life history information and genetic analysis through Hudson Canyon.

Amendment Development Plan

August Meeting Recap

To facilitate efficient and focused development of a management framework for blueline tilefish, the Council decided to use an Amendment to the Golden Tilefish Fishery Management Plan as the vehicle for action, and to not pursue adding other deep water species at this time. The Council chose not to establish any control dates at the August meeting but did not eliminate limited access as a possible management option for the Amendment (though it was noted that considering limited access systems may require a longer amendment development time). The Council noted that creative strategies for determining recreational catch and/or ABCs will likely be required. The Council also discussed possible recreational reporting issues and approaches, which have been incorporated in the possible management alternatives.

General Options/Approach on Stock Unit

Preliminary discussions with GARFO staff highlight the need to decide whether the assumption for the blueline tilefish stock unit would be a separate Mid-Atlantic stock managed by the Mid-Atlantic Council or a shared coastwide Atlantic stock possibly managed by both the Mid-Atlantic and the South Atlantic Councils (or develop plans for either scenario). Based on discussions with Council leadership, staff is developing the amendment under the assumption that there will be a Mid-Atlantic stock or portion of a unit stock to manage after the genetic work has been completed. GARFO staff has noted that the genetic/stock unit question will need to be resolved before moving forward with a NEPA document.

Non-Inclusion of Limited Access

The Council noted at the August 2015 meeting that limited access programs often require longer development periods as different qualification criteria are developed and evaluated. GARFO staff has also communicated that after reviewing prior actions, it seems that all prior actions that implemented limited access programs in our region have used an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In addition, a limited access program would require additional implementation time to establish qualification criteria and go through the process of collecting and evaluating applications for the new permit. This would mean we would be unlikely to make the current June 2016 target for implementing this action. While the Council can have the FMAT further develop options for limited access, it may be best to hold off on limited access for a possible future action rather than try to include it in this Amendment given the potential to slow progress. The primary benefit of implementing limited access would be identifying a limited set of vessels that might have a higher degree of access to the resource given historical participation if there is a restrictive quota (likely). Maintaining open access likely means that relatively lower trip limits will be necessary given there would be no limits on participation. At this point, limited access is not in the list of management alternatives that would be further developed in this amendment (would be included in considered but rejected section). Staff does recommend publishing a control date (would be the date the notice is published by NMFS, probably early November 2015) as a marker for possible future limited access programs for blueline tilefish. The Council does not have to use a published control date and can make a new control date(s) later. Having a formal notice that limited access may be considered in the future seems warranted for what could be a fishery with very limited catch limits, especially given reports during scoping of growing interest in this fishery in some areas.

Other Management Alternatives

Management unit

The Amendment will specify the management unit based on the genetics project. If the genetic work suggests different stocks, they may or may not align with current Council boundaries. Further development will have to wait for the results of the genetics project.

Status determination criteria

Most Council plans currently have provisions to adopt the most recent peer reviewed assessment findings for status determination criteria. Presumably until then blueline tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic would be “unknown,” like *Illex* squid or mackerel.

Permit and reporting requirements for commercial vessels, operators and dealers (adopted from golden tilefish FMP)

Currently: Any vessel of the United States must have been issued and have on board a valid Federal commercial (golden) tilefish permit to fish for, catch, possess, transport, land, sell, trade, or barter, any blueline tilefish in excess of the recreational possession limit.

Options: Make the current permit a joint permit or create a separate blueline permit. Provisions for the current golden tilefish permit are below.

Vessels landing tilefish for sale will be required to have Federal Vessel permits. A dealer permit is required for dealers purchasing tilefish harvested from the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in addition to dealers purchasing tilefish from permitted vessels. Dealers issued a tilefish dealer permit must report all fish purchases along with information required at section 648.7 (1)(i).

Operators of commercial vessels (vessels with permits to sell tilefish) will be required to obtain Operator permits.

Vessels landing tilefish for sale would need to submit vessel logbook/trip reports (VTRs). Dealers would need to submit dealer reports.

The current vessel logbook requires vessels to report everything they catch including bycatch.

These are the standard set of permits and reporting that the Council uses in most of their FMPs.

There is no within fishing year changes allowed among the various vessel permit categories.

Would the Council want to consider requiring electronic VTRs for blueline tilefish?

Permit and reporting requirements for for-hire vessels.

Currently: Any party or charter vessel must have been issued a Federal Charter/Party (golden) tilefish vessel permit to fish for blueline tilefish in the EEZ with passengers for hire. Any vessel with any Greater Atlantic federal party/charter must report all catches of all species of fish.

Options: Make the current permit a joint permit or create a separate blueline permit.
Require electronic VTR submission.

Permit and reporting requirements for private recreational vessels.

Other than license requirements, there are no other permit or reporting requirements for private recreational fishermen related to tilefish (blueline or golden). Due to the inability of MRIP to produce tilefish estimates in the Mid-Atlantic because of the infrequency of catches, the Amendment will consider several options:

- Mandatory reporting by a to-be specified reporting system (on-line, possibly modified VTR/SAFIS).
- Recreational tilefish permit.
- Require private recreational fishermen to possess an HMS permit to fish for tilefish and use the HMS reporting system for recreational Bluefin tuna. Preliminary discussions with HMS staff suggest this idea is worth exploring from a feasibility perspective. The current system is run by contract so funding of system modifications, maintenance, and data flow would have to be considered.

The establishment of a FMP Monitoring Committee.

Recommended: Use current Tilefish Monitoring Committee

Put in considered but rejected: Use separate Monitoring Committee

Recreational/commercial allocation options

- SAFMC: 50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational
- Use available data, 5 and 10 year periods
 - Total weight, average of each year's split, median
- 50-50
- Evaluate options for dealing with inconsistent/incomplete recreational data.

Framework adjustment process.

Allow any existing or previously analyzed measure (within an FMP or amendment) to be frame-worked.

Range of trip limits for commercial permits.

- Status quo = 300 pounds
- Range: 150, 450, 600, 900

Provisions for monitoring commercial quota and reducing trip limit

- Weekly/Biweekly monitoring via dealer data.
- Options for lower trip limit once certain amount of commercial quota reached

Range of trip limits for recreational fishing.

- Standard Trip/Possession Limit - Status quo + Range
- Higher trip limit options for trips lasting over 36/48 hours
- Combination blueline/golden trip limits.

Identification and description of essential tilefish habitat (EFH).

- Blueline tilefish EFH is currently specified in snapper-grouper plan through NC
- EFH could be identified based on life history similar to golden tilefish: all offshore waters over the Continental Shelf and Slope with water depths from 46-256m (Sedberry et al. 2006), from the United States/Canadian boundary to the Virginia/North Carolina boundary
- If possible rely on existing closures to address effects of fishing for the time being
- It may be possible to totally defer specification of EFH until MAFMC EFH review (2016-2017), GARFO staff is evaluating this.

ABCs/ACLs/AMs

- Specify applicability of Council's Risk Policy for ABC setting
 - Conduct MSE (like mackerel, once genetic information is available)?
 - Begin discussions with SSC regarding possible approaches.
- Other specifications: ACLs, ACTs, TALs, etc.
 - Provisions for Tilefish Monitoring Committee recommendations
- Develop range of AMs (use other Council recreational species as model)

Final Summary Report Snapper Grouper Committee

The Beach House Hilton Head Island
1 South Forest Beach Drive
Hilton Head, SC

September 2015

The Snapper Grouper Committee met on September 15 & 16, 2015, in Hilton Head Island, SC.

SSC report on September 9th webinar pertaining to Blueline Tilefish

Dr. Luiz Barbieri, SSC Chair, presented an overview the SSC's deliberations during the webinar held on September 9th. The SSC convened to review revised projections for blueline tilefish and make an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendation. The SSC recommended that the 2016 and 2017 ABC for blueline tilefish be based on the equilibrium yield at 75% F_{MSY} , or 224,100 lbs. whole weight. The Committee stressed that this recommendation should not be in place for more than two years.

Mr. Tony DiLernia, representative of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) on the Snapper Grouper Committee, indicated the MAFMC is in the process of adding blueline tilefish to their existing Golden Tilefish Fishery Management Plan and has committee funding to conduct genetic studies to determine stock structure. Mr. DiLernia indicated that the MAFMC intends to manage blueline tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic region primarily as a recreational fishery. Temporary management measures are in place in the Mid-Atlantic region until the current emergency rule expires.

Framework Amendment (Regulatory Amendment X)

Myra Brouwer, Council staff, presented a Decision Document to assist the Committee in making decisions regarding adjustment of the blueline tilefish ABC and ACL. The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION: MOVE ALTERNATIVES 5 AND 6 TO CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX AND SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 AS PRELIMINARY PREFERRED FOR ACTION 1

Action 1. Adjust the Annual Catch Limit for blueline tilefish

Alternative 2. ACL = OY = 93%ABC (based on landings 2005-2013). Specify commercial and recreational annual catch limits based on existing sector allocations (50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational).

$$\text{ACL} = \text{OY} = 0.93 * 224,100 = 208,413 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Commercial ACL} = 104,352 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Recreational ACL} = 104,061 \text{ lbs ww}$$

MOTION FAILS (4 IN FAVOR/6 OPPOSED/2 ABSTENTIONS)

MOTION: APPROVE THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 1 FOR DETAILED ANALYSES

Action 1. Adjust the Annual Catch Limit for blueline tilefish

Alternative 1 (No Action). ACL = OY = 98%ABC. Commercial and recreational annual catch limits are based on 50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational.

$$\text{ACL} = \text{OY} = 0.98 * 54,548 = 53,457 \text{ lbs ww.}$$

$$\text{Commercial ACL} = 26,766 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Recreational ACL} = 26,691 \text{ lbs ww}$$

Alternative 2. ACL = OY = 93%ABC (based on landings 2005-2013). Specify commercial and recreational annual catch limits based on existing sector allocations (50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational).

$$\text{ACL} = \text{OY} = 0.93 * 224,100 = 208,413 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Commercial ACL} = 104,352 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Recreational ACL} = 104,061 \text{ lbs ww}$$

Alternative 3. ACL = OY = 89%ABC (based on landings 2011-2013). Specify commercial and recreational annual catch limits based on existing sector allocations (50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational).

$$\text{ACL} = \text{OY} = 0.89 * 224,100 = 199,449 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Commercial ACL} = 99,864 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Recreational ACL} = 99,585 \text{ lbs ww}$$

Alternative 4. ACL = OY = 96%ABC (based on landings 2005-2014). Specify commercial and recreational annual catch limits based on existing sector allocations (50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational).

$$\text{ACL} = \text{OY} = 0.96 * 224,100 = 215,136 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Commercial ACL} = 107,719 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Recreational ACL} = 107,417 \text{ lbs ww}$$

Alternative 5. ACL = OY = 88%ABC (based on landings 2005-2014). Specify commercial and recreational annual catch limits based on existing sector allocations (50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational).

$$\text{ACL} = \text{OY} = 0.88 * 224,100 = 197,208 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Commercial ACL} = 98,742 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Recreational ACL} = 98,466 \text{ lbs ww}$$

Alternative 6. ACL = OY = 78%ABC (based on landings 2011-2014). Specify commercial and recreational annual catch limits based on existing sector allocations (50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational).

$$\text{ACL} = \text{OY} = 0.78 * 224,100 = 174,798 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Commercial ACL} = 87,521 \text{ lbs ww}$$

$$\text{Recreational ACL} = 87,277 \text{ lbs ww}$$

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: INCLUDE THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES FOR ACTION 2 (COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT) FOR DETAILED ANALYSIS

Alternative 1 (No Action). 100-lb gw commercial trip limit for blueline tilefish.

Alternative 2. 200-lb gw commercial trip limit for blueline tilefish.

Alternative 3. 300-lb gw commercial trip limit for blueline tilefish.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: MOVE OPTIONS 5, 6 & 7 OF ACTION 3 (BAG LIMIT ANALYSIS) TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX

OPTION 5. blueline tilefish vessel limit of 1/vessel/day may and june (closed rest of year).

OPTION 6. blueline tilefish vessel limit of 1/vessel/day in may (closed rest of year).

OPTION 7. blueline tilefish vessel limit of 1/vessel/day in june (closed rest of year).

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ADD ALTERNATIVE TO EXPLORE 1 PER PERSON PER DAY DURING MAY-AUGUST:

Alternative 1 (No Action). blueline tilefish vessel limit of 1/vessel/day may through august (closed rest of year).

Alternative 2. blueline tilefish bag limit of 1/person/day.

Alternative 3. blueline tilefish vessel limit of 1/vessel/day.

Alternative 4. blueline tilefish bag limit of 1/person/day may through august.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ADD ACTION TO CHANGE THE START DATE OF THE COMMERCIAL FISHING YEAR FOR YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER

GUIDANCE TO STAFF TO LOOK AT RANGE OF START DATES IN SUMMER MONTHS

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: DIRECT STAFF TO PREPARE SNAPPER GROUPEL REGULATORY AMENDMENT X, APPROVE FOR PUBLIC HEARING, AND ADOPT TIMING SHOWN BELOW:

- Review draft Actions/Alternatives and select preferred alternatives – September 2015
- Approve for public hearings – September 2015
- Hearings held via webinar in November 2015 and hearing at the December 2015 meeting
- Final approval and send for formal review – December 2015
- Regulations effective as soon as possible in 2016 (April 1st or May 1st target)

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Amendment 38 (blueline tilefish)

An Options Paper for Amendment 38 was prepared for the June 2015 Council meeting. However, due to timing constraints, no discussion took place at that meeting. The Options Paper includes options for extending the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit northward to address fishing mortality of blueline tilefish north of North Carolina. This action would possibly also address the continued shift of species northward due to climate change. The Options Paper also includes draft actions and alternatives to address permitting in the northward extension.

In light of the Mid-Atlantic Council moving forward with developing management measures for blueline tilefish and possibly developing a Fishery management Plan for deepwater species, the Committee recommended halting development of Amendment 38 at this time.

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE



**SSC Meeting Report
September 9, 2015
1:00 – 3:00 pm
MEETING VIA WEBINAR**

**VERSION
FINAL
September 15, 2015**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Documents

Agenda

1.2. Action

- Introductions
- Review and Approve Agenda

The SSC meeting was called to order at 1:00p.m., as scheduled.

The agenda was adopted without change and the minutes of the June 2015 webinar meeting were adopted without further comment or changes. Member introductions were made. The Chair reviewed the agenda and outlined the general format and conduct of the meeting as discussed in the overview document.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public will be provided two opportunities to comment on SSC agenda items during this meeting. The first at the start of the meeting, and the final will be provided at the end during the review of recommendations. Those wishing to make comment should indicate their desire to do so to the Committee Chair.

Accordingly, at this point in the meeting the Chair opened the floor for the first opportunity for public comment. Comments were provided by several members of the public.

3. BLUELINE TILEFISH STOCK PROJECTIONS

3.1. Documents

Attachment 1. Prior Blueline Tilefish Projections

Attachment 2. June 3, 2015 SSC Report

Attachment 3. SAFMC Projection Request Memo June 2015

Attachment 4. Scientific concerns regarding SSC projection scenarios*

Attachment 5. Revised projections August 2015

Attachment 6. SERO Request, further projection details August 2015

Attachment 7. SAFMC Request, corrected projection landings August 2015

Attachment 8. Revisions and landings update August 2015*

Attachment 9. ABC Alternatives Discussion Document

3.2. Overview

At a webinar held June 3, 2015, the SSC reviewed a suite of projections for the Blueline Tilefish stock (Attachment 1). The SSC concluded that the projections were not Best Scientific Information Available and therefore not adequate to support fishing level recommendations (Attachment 2). As a result, the SSC requested revised projections reflecting observed landings and using the standard projection approaches used previously. Alternative exploratory projection approaches were also identified by the SSC to address uncertainties with productivity and spatial patterns. The Council requested that the SEFSC prepare the projections suggested by the SSC (Attachment 3), and was informed that the additional scenarios requested by the SSC would not be provided due to a determination that they lacked sufficient scientific support (Attachment 4). Although this document is cited in the projection results (Attachment 5), as of the completion of this overview, the Council has not received approval from the Center to distribute the memo.

The SEFSC's response to the Council's request, addressed to the Regional Administrator on August 12, 2015 (Attachment 5), included results for the standard projection approach incorporating observed landings through 2015. Requests for additional information and further revisions to the projections were submitted to the SEFSC soon after receipt of the initial projections: SERO requested further projection outputs to provide more information on stock size and status (Attachment 6) and the Council requested revisions to landings used in the projections for 2012-2015 (Attachment 7). The results of these requests will be combined, if received separately, into a single document for this SSC review (as Attachment 8) and provided to the SSC once the information is received. As of completion of this document on August 25, the additional analyses were not available.

To facilitate discussion during this webinar, Council staff prepared a document proposing various alternatives for fishing level recommendations, in particular ABC, to address the direction given by the SSC at the earlier webinar and the analyses provided by the SEFSC (Attachment 9).

3.3. Action

- Review the most recent Blueline Tilefish stock projections of August 2015.
 - Determine whether the information provided addresses the SSCs

request.

- Identify uncertainties in the projections and discuss their impact on projection results and fishing level recommendations and management.
- Determine whether projection assumptions (e.g., recruitment, fishing mortality, interim year landings) are met, and comment on the consequences of this determination for fishing level recommendations and management.
- Determine whether available projections represent Best Scientific Information Available, and whether they are adequate to support fishing level recommendations for both the current and future years.
- Provide guidance for revised projections, if necessary.
- Provide revised Fishing Level Recommendations, including ABC and OFL, for 2016 and 2017. (The next assessment of Blueline Tilefish is scheduled for review by the SSC in April 2017.)

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC received an overview presentation from Mike Errigo summarizing the history of SEDAR 32 projections and the issues associated with them (i.e., recruitment, fishing mortality, interim landings, etc.). The Committee then discussed the chronology and content of response letters and different sets of blueline tilefish projections provided by the SEFSC.

The SEFSC felt that there was not sufficient scientific support for providing the exploratory alternative recruitment scenarios requested by the SSC, i.e., a lack of empirical evidence and that a multitude of equally likely scenarios could have been investigated. Consequently, the Committee was provided only a limited set of projections that prevented the SSC from evaluating all the scenarios originally requested. Instead of exploring the requested recruitment scenarios, the SEFSC recommended updating the handline index and looking at the slope of that index from 2012 to date. If the slope of the index was remaining flat or rising, that could be used as an indicator that catch levels over the last three years are not having an appreciable negative impact on the stock for the area covered by the index, i.e. Cape Hatteras to Cape Canaveral. In this case the SEFSC suggested that catch level advice going forward could be based on average landings for the years just prior to the recent large increases until the Center is able to assess the stock again.

Based on the limited scope of the projections (i.e., not all recruitment scenarios were evaluated), the high degree of uncertainty in the original assessment, and the

disconnect between assessment and projections (the terminal year of data for this assessment was 2011 and the fishery has undergone major changes since then), the SSC concluded that the projections provided by the SEFSC do not represent the Best Scientific Information Available and were not adequate to support blueline tilefish fishing level recommendations for either current or future years.

The SSC then discussed alternatives for developing fishing level recommendations for blueline tilefish:

- 1) The Committee discussed that given the new information (e.g., recent landings), the assessment may no longer represent the Best Scientific Information Available and, therefore, cannot be used for management advice. According to the ABC control rule, catch advice would be based on the ORCS method or another method in the control rule decision tree.*
- 2) Set ABC at the equilibrium yield at 75% F_{MSY}*

After much discussion, the SSC consensus was that option 2 was the best recommendation given the information before the Committee. Although the SSC agreed that the projections based on the 2012 assessment, cannot be used for setting the ABC primarily due to the required length of the projection period into the future (from 2011 to 2017), the assessment estimates of reference points (B_{MSY} , F_{MSY}) based on historic stock production remain to be the best scientific information available and can be used for management advice. Given that the assessment results based on two types of assessment models (BAM and ASPIC) indicated that the stock generally fluctuated around the B_{MSY} and the fact that recent catches remain high, the fishery dependent index appears to have a positive trend, and there was no significant change in the age and size composition of the catch in recent years, the Committee felt that the ABC at equilibrium yield at 75% F_{MSY} is adequate and provides the best option for management. This method has been used in the past, but the SSC recognizes that this recommendation is based on results from the SEDAR 32 stock assessment, which had a very high degree of uncertainty.

The Committee notes that the same sources of scientific uncertainty that accompanied earlier advice from the June 2015 webinar also pertain to this ABC recommendation. These sources include the lack of fishery-independent survey information, the northward shift in landings in recent years, and the lack of biological characteristics and abundance information for blueline tilefish north of North Carolina.

The Committee stressed the fact that, given the uncertainties and paucity of information, this recommendation should be in place for no more than 2 years. This would bridge the period to completion of the upcoming blueline tilefish assessment, upon which further recommendations can be based assuming it passes SEDAR review.

Therefore, the SSC recommends that the 2016 and 2017 ABC for blueline tilefish be based on the equilibrium yield at 75% F_{MSY} , or 224,100 lbs. whole weight. The SSC wishes to emphasize that by not accepting the projection results as BSIA, no basis exists to infer the current (i.e., 2015) status of the blueline tilefish stock or the impact of the fishery with respect to the accepted status determination criteria for this stock. As well, no basis exists

to quantitatively gauge the consequences on the stock of the SSC's ABC recommendation for 2016 and 2017.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

The SSC did not discuss any items under 'Other Business.'

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is provided an additional opportunity to comment on SSC recommendations and agenda items.

Public comments were made by SAFMC Chairman Ben Hartig and Vice-Chairman Michelle Duval.

6. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS REVIEW

The Committee is provided this opportunity to review its recommendations and consensus statements recorded during the meeting.

The final SSC report should be provided to the Council by 9 am on Tuesday, September 15, 2015 for distribution to the Council for its September meeting. Recognizing the short turn around required, the Council requests that, if the final report cannot be provided, SSC recommendations addressing the TORs be provided by the SSC chair at the Snapper Grouper Committee meeting on September 15, 2015.

7. ADJOURN

The SSC meeting was adjourned.