



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901-3910
Phone: 302-674-2331 | Toll Free: 877-446-2362 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org
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 blue-line 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 blue-line 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)