

2017 Tilefish Advisory Panel (AP)
BlueLine Tilefish Fishery Performance Report (FPR)

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council's) Tilefish Advisory Panel (AP) met via Webinar on February 9, 2017 to review the fishery information document and develop the **BlueLine** Tilefish Fishery Performance Report (FPR) based on advisor perspectives on catch and landings patterns and other trends in this fishery. The following is the report from the Tilefish AP.

The Advisers in attendance were: David Arbeitman, Ron Callis, Denny Dobbins, Dan Farnham, Frank Green, Jeffrey Gutman, Michael Johnson, Jan McDowell, and John Nolan III. They represent tilefish commercial fisherman (from New York and New Jersey); recreational fishermen (private/head boats, bait and tackle business, from New Jersey and Virginia); and research/academia (VIMS). Also in attendance were: Laurie Nolan and Tom Baum - Council Members; Doug Potts - GARFO; Paul Nitschke and Barbara Rountree - NEFSC; Fred Akers; Greg DiDomenico – GSSA; Jason Didden and José Montañez - Council Staff.

The fishery performance report's primary purpose is to contextualize catch histories for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) because of the potential importance of this and related information for determining Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs) in cases of fisheries with high levels of assessment uncertainty. The goal is to allow comparing and contrasting of the most recent year's conditions (2015/2016) and fishery characteristics with previous years. The following trigger questions were used to guide discussion, and the summary of the AP's input follows.

*What factors have influenced recent catch?

- Markets/economy? – Environment?
- Fishery regulations? – Other factors?

*Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?

- Gear regulations and exemptions? -Trip Limits? -Others?

*Where should the Council and Commission focus their research priorities?

*What else is important for the Council to know?

General Observations

- No major changes have been observed for bluelines in terms of catch rates/composition. Once blueline limits are met then recreational trips search for other targets (goldens). There is a sense from some AP members that the fishery restrictions are/will be benefiting recreational catch per unit effort (CPUE).

Factors Influencing Catch

- Commercial landings since June 2015 have been heavily influenced (restricted) by regulations limiting the fishery to an incidental trip limit.
- Recreational For-Hire Vessel Trip Report (VTR) landings would also have been higher without trip limits since June 2015. Recreational limits depress catch and effort.
- Weather impacts effort – Weather in 2016 similar or slightly windier vs 2015.
- Recreational landings are also constrained by state bag limits.
- Recreational effort changes – Some areas seem to have higher numbers of deep-droppers (Northern), others lower in 2016 (Mid Delmarva area – less offshore activity generally in 2016). The fishery is becoming more and more understood and more people have the required gear. Moderate tuna availability in deeper water translates into highest effort (enough tuna to create effort, but not so much as to occupy interest for a whole trip). Applies for bluelines even more than goldens due to shallower depth of bluelines. Ocean City advisor reported more effort, both charter and private.

Input on Regulations

- Has the 300-pound incidental trip limit caused any regulatory discarding? Not too often in golden tilefish fishery – incidental landings in 2016 were typical and generally accommodated by the 300-pound trip limit. Some southern area effort has had to shift within particular trips to avoid bluelines once 300 pounds were retained.
- Has the 7-fish recreational trip limit caused any regulatory discarding? No, but it is causing shifts in effort away from bluelines once limit reached.
- Some AP members would like the Council to consider a higher trip limit for longer recreational trips, structured after Gulf of Mexico regulations. Other AP members were concerned about the impact of higher recreational limits on the overall fishery especially given low ABC and recreational catch uncertainty.
- Some AP members would like the Council to consider a higher blueline trip limit for longer directed commercial IFQ golden tilefish trips to prevent regulatory discarding. This could include a bycatch percentage of total landings limitation.
- Regarding the recreational measures in the Amendment¹:
One advisor recommended multi-day considerations for all types of recreational trips if the Amendment's system is used. Two advisors recommended standing pat with the current system until we can see how it performs.

¹ May 1 – October 31 and per-person recreational bag limits of 7 blueline tilefish on for-hire inspected vessels, 5 blueline tilefish on for-hire uninspected vessels, and 3 blueline tilefish on private vessels

Research Priority Ideas

- Need an actual assessment.
- Need survey to inform assessments.

Other Issues Raised

- General concern about appropriateness of current ABC given recent catches. Blueline ABC is 1/20th of golden tilefish despite likely similar productivity in mid-Atlantic – does not make sense.