

**Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Standing and Special Reef Fish SSC
Review of SEDAR 22 – Tilefish
Tampa, Florida
May 17-19, 2011**

Acting Chair Dr. Sean Powers opened the meeting at 8:30 a.m.

SEDAR 22 Tilefish Assessment

Dr. Linton gave a presentation reviewing the tilefish benchmark assessment. The assessment was similar to the yellowedge grouper assessment, but there were issues with the data inputs, and hermaphroditism was not as clear cut as with yellowedge grouper. Both the commercial longline index and NMFS bottom longline index in the eastern Gulf indicated that abundance was increasing, but the model failed to fit either index and instead predicted a declining trend in the eastern stock's abundance. There were also two issues involving the age composition data. There were no discernable year classes moving through the age compositions, and there was a lack of age 17-21 year old fish in the age composition data, perhaps owing to difficulty estimating the ages of older male fish. With no strong recruitment signal, the model estimated a large wave of recruitment events in the 1990s to fit the observed proportions of age 10-15 year old fish in the 2000s. Due to these issues, assessment results were highly sensitive to the value specified for the standard deviation parameter associated with recruitment (σ -R).

The Assessment Panel decided that the uncertainties in the assessment results were too great to justify running projections, and recommended that the assessment results be used in conjunction with historical catch data and expert judgment to provide management advice. However, the Review Panel felt that there would be value in running projections, and selected three model runs for providing management advice. Due to problems with the allocation of fishing effort, the model runs projected the eastern Gulf stock being driven to low levels, while the western Gulf stock remained relatively untouched and capable of sustaining the Gulf-wide population.

It was noted that the NMFS bottom longline survey was not designed for tilefish and operated at the edge of the tilefish distribution. John Walter pointed out that when the longline was set in depths where tilefish are found, there were 29% to 60% positive sets, resulting in 4 to 30 tilefish sampled per year. Mr. Gregory felt that a tuned VPA analyses might have shown less inconsistency than the Stock Synthesis 3 model since it was not dependent on a stock-recruit curve. A motion was made to accept the assessment as the best available scientific information, with the intent of later discussion whether the information was adequate for management decisions. However, NOAA General Counsel felt that a declaration of best available scientific information would mean that information would have to be used for management, and the motion was withdrawn. After some discussion on how to indicate that the assessment and data were properly handled but were not adequate for management decisions, the SSC passed the following motion:

The SSC concludes that the SEDAR 22 Tilefish Benchmark Assessment Report, although based on the best available data, and consistent with the terms of reference

(TORs), does not capture the dynamics of the Gulf tilefish stock to sufficiently provide useful management advice.

Motion passed 10-1.

The SSC next discussed what management advice it could give based on the data in the assessment. In the ABC control rule, neither Tier 1 nor Tier 2 could be used, leaving Tier 3. Given that the assessment indicated that, Gulf-wide, the stock was not overfished, the SSC felt that Tier 3a was appropriate. An ABC working group that was a subset of the SSC had previously recommended that the years 1992-2008 be used as the baseline for tilefish to calculate the mean and standard deviations, but since 2009 landings were available in the stock assessment, the SSC decided to use 1992-2009 as the baseline, using landings as reported in the assessment.

The SSC recommends an OFL for tilefish of mean plus 2 standard deviations and an ABC of mean plus 1 standard deviation. Both of these are based on landings from 1992-2009, as presented in the SEDAR 22 Tilefish Benchmark Assessment Report, according to Tier 3a of the ABC Control Rule.

Motion passed unanimously.

The resulting values for OFL and ABC in both whole weight and gutted weight were calculated by Dr. Linton as follows:

	Whole Wt.	Gutted Wt.
OFL	597,436	533,425
ABC	491,191	438,563