



Blueline Tilefish Fishery Performance Report

February 2023

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Tilefish Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on April 20, 2023, to review the Blueline Tilefish Fishery Information Document and develop the following Fishery Performance Report. The primary purpose of this report is to contextualize catch histories by providing information about fishing effort, market trends, environmental changes, and other factors. The trigger questions listed below were posed to the AP to generate discussion of observations in the blueline tilefish fishery. Please note: Advisor comments described below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements.

Advisory Panel members present: Fred Akers (Private), Carl Forsberg (For-Hire/Commercial), and Laurie Nolan (Commercial).

Others present: Paul Nitschke (NEFSC), Joe Cimino (Council Member), Doug Potts (GARFO), Hannah Hart (Council Staff), and José Montañez (Council Staff).

Trigger questions

1. What factors have influenced recent catch (markets/economy, environment, regulations, other factors)?
2. Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?
3. What would you recommend as research priorities?
4. What else is important for the Council to know?

Factors Influencing Catch

Low quota and trip limits constrain effort/landings for both the commercial and recreational sectors. The low blueline trip limits discourage any sort of directed fishing effort, and most trips catching blueline tilefish are typically trips that are targeting other species and incidentally catching blueline tilefish or multi-species trips.

Market/Economic Conditions

One AP member commented that the price of blueline is sufficient to drive commercial effort, as seen by the landings in 2013 through 2015 prior to the established management in the Mid-Atlantic, but because of the low quota and trip limits most blueline activity is represented by fill-in trips or incidental catch. The same AP member commented that market and economics cannot be considered as a condition driving the fishery due to the constraining quota and trip limits.

An AP member expressed that industry participants may put together a directed trip by mixing blueline, goldens, and other fish, but this activity is also hindered by current fishing regulations. The AP member also noted that any blueline direct trips are not financially feasible due to the

overall cost of a fishing trip (e.g., fuel, ice, crew, etc.) and the current, post COVID-19 economic reality does not make this any better.

General Management Issues

Some AP members reiterated some of the comments above about the low quota and trip limits constraining overall blueline tilefish effort/landings.

Recreational Fishery Issues

An AP member commented that they go recreationally fishing for both blueline and golden tilefish far offshore in areas where both species are present. In these areas they do not commonly see other anglers, other than during times of year when there is a tuna tournament. Given their lack of interactions with other private recreational tilefish anglers, the AP member expressed concern with annual MRIP estimates. Another AP member commented that this also gives them concern about tilefish kept estimates from the Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) data presented in a recent Golden Tilefish Management Track Assessment Working Group data meeting and the number of estimated tilefish caught through that database. Both AP members expressed general concern with using tilefish MRIP estimates and suggested using them with extreme caution or not at all. One of the AP members expressed similar sentiment about the LPS data.

The AP member commented that recreational fishing may also be limited by cost due to the amount of fuel it takes to travel this far offshore.

The same AP member expressed that the 3-fish private recreational bag limit discourages private recreational directed effort. The AP member commented that they often go fishing in areas where both blueline and golden tilefish can be caught to make the trip worth their while. The AP member also expressed concern that the 3-fish bag limit may also contribute to regulatory discards. He expressed that when fisherman catch the 3 fish bag limit, they are faced with the decision to either continue to fish for the day targeting other species (e.g., golden tilefish) and discard any blueline caught or to stop fishing and head back to shore for the day. The AP member expressed that this can be especially problematic if they catch their blueline limit early in the day before having the chance to catch any other species they are targeting. The AP member noted they have tried to use descending devices to increase the fish's chance of survival but is unsure if these devices are effective for blueline.

Two AP members expressed support to delay the recreational blueline tilefish season to better align the blueline tilefish season with the black sea bass season. In New Jersey, the black sea bass season in 2024 will open on May 17. The AP member commented that when they go fishing for tilefish, it is not uncommon for them to stop at a wreck on their way out to the tilefish grounds, to target black sea bass. The AP member expressed that shifting the blueline tilefish season back two weeks will help control temporal effort on both fisheries as well as minimize any regulatory discards. The AP member spoke in support of the suggested May 15 – November 15 staff has been hearing about and was not particularly concerned if the two season start dates were off by a few days as a result of the state specific black sea bass regulations from year to year.

One AP member noted they use the eFin logbook reporting application and suggested adding a question to get additional data on what other species private recreational anglers are catching when targeting tilefish. They expressed adding this question will help with overall accountability for the recreational sector.

An AP member expressed the need for NOAA to add a link or reference to the tilefish permitting and reporting requirements on their Highly Migratory Species (HMS) permit renewal website. The AP member noted almost every private vessel fishing deep enough to catch tilefish likely has an HMS permit. The AP member noted making this same comment in the past and understands staff has been working to get this information on the HMS webpage. The AP member encouraged staff to continue to work through this effort and with HMS to improve the overall awareness of and compliance with the tilefish permitting and reporting requirements.

Research Priorities

An AP member expressed support for the expansion of the South Atlantic deepwater longline survey into the Mid-Atlantic and looks forward to seeing the outcomes of that work.

Public Input

No additional comments