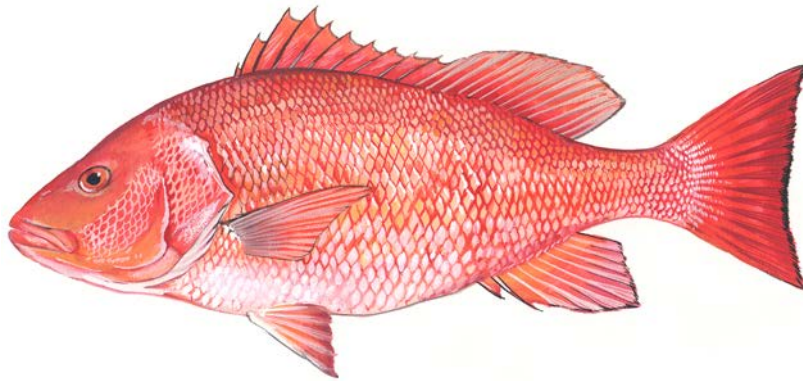


**Public Hearing Summary  
for  
Amendment 43 to the Fishery Management Plan for  
the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic  
Region**



**August 4, 2017  
Revised**



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## Why is the South Atlantic Council considering action?

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) is considering action to allow fishermen to harvest red snapper while preventing overfishing and allowing the stock to rebuild. Harvest of red snapper from federal waters has not been allowed since 2014 because total removals (landings plus dead discards) exceeded the acceptable biological catch established in Snapper Grouper Amendment 28 (SAFMC 2013). Amendment 28 established a process that would set the annual catch limit to zero (no mini-season) if total removals (landings plus dead discards) exceeded the acceptable biological catch in the previous year. Estimates of dead discards were included in the process because a portion of red snapper released die because of hooking injuries, barotrauma, and/or predation. The estimated number of red snapper released dead or subsequently died due to injuries exceeded the acceptable biological catch in 2014, 2015, and 2016 and red snapper harvest was not allowed in 2015, 2016, or 2017.

The health of the red snapper stock in the South Atlantic was investigated using a new benchmark stock assessment with data through 2014 (SEDAR 41 2017). The assessment results were presented to the Scientific and Statistical Committee, an advisory body to the Council that recommends acceptable biological catch levels, and was deemed best scientific information. The assessment indicated that the stock was overfished and overfishing was occurring over the last 20 years (1994-2014). The acceptable biological catch recommendation based on SEDAR 41 (2017) included both landings and dead discards. The National Marine Fisheries Service has stated the use of an acceptable biological catch based primarily on recreational discard estimates is likely ineffective for monitoring red snapper removals due to uncertainty in the estimate of discards and there are upcoming changes to the effort estimation for calculating recreational effort. The Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended that, until the changes are complete, Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) discard estimates from private recreational and charter vessels should not be used for management (SAFMC 2017).

While the acceptable biological catch estimate is revised and the estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program for private recreational and charter vessel are calibrated, the Council is considering conservative measures to allow a mini-season beginning in 2018. Such measures would remain in place until modified. The alternatives the Council is considering are based on red snapper landings from 2012, 2013, and 2014 with some of the alternatives adjusted based on increases in red snapper abundance observed through a scientific survey (**Figure S-1**). The landings used in the analysis included commercial logbook data, headboat logbook data, South Carolina charter boat logbook data, a Georgia charter boat survey, a survey of vessels using methods in Sauls et al. (2017), and other sources (see **Appendix N** and **O** in the draft amendment). The survey is done with fish traps and has been conducted with similar methods since 1991. In 2015 and 2016, the survey indicated that the red snapper stock increased by 1.88 times since 2014 and is at the highest point since 1991. This increase in the population is an encouraging sign that management has been effective in

addressing overfishing. Additionally the Scientific and Statistical Committee stated, “a continuing upward trend in the fishery independent index has a high probability of reflecting increases in population size.” (SAFMC 2017) Thus, based on the SSC reports and fishery independent abundance index trends, the risk of overfishing is likely reduced if annual catch limits are limited to recent catch levels. Overfishing is essentially a ratio of landings compared to population size. If landings are limited to recent levels and the population has grown, then the resulting fishing mortality and risk of overfishing is decreased.

Allowing a limited amount of harvest would likely reduce the social and economic impacts of a year-round closure. Additionally, allowing some harvest will enable collection of scientific information on red snapper and the fishery. Fishery regulations for red snapper changed substantially in 2010 and fishery-dependent information, data collected from fishermen, has been limited during closed years. During the open seasons, scientists can collect information on the size of fish harvested, age of fish harvested, fishery selectivity, and fishermen’s behavior on private recreational vessels. A recent publication from the Southeast Fishery Science Center has stated that collecting more age information for the snapper grouper fishery has the greatest influence on the accuracy of assessments (Siegfried et al. 2016).

The Council has moved additional actions related to red snapper management contained in previous drafts of Amendment 43 to a separate amendment (Amendment 46). That amendment will revisit red snapper management reference points, recreational reporting, and best fishing practices. Additionally, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center is exploring alternative methods to develop future ABCs for red snapper.

### ***South Atlantic Fishery Management Council***

- Responsible for conservation and management of fish stocks in the area comprising 3 to 200 nautical miles off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida through Key West.
- The South Atlantic Council consists of 13 voting members appointed by the Secretary of Commerce and 4 non-voting members. The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Council also includes one voting seat for a representative from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.
- Develop management plans/amendments and recommends regulations to NMFS for implementation

**This Public Hearing Summary  
includes the actions and alternatives, a brief discussion  
for each action, and a summary of the analysis.**

**For full analysis of potential effects of the actions, please  
see the Draft Amendment 43 (full document) available  
[http://safmc.net/meetings/public-hearing-and-scoping-  
meeting-schedule#ph3](http://safmc.net/meetings/public-hearing-and-scoping-meeting-schedule#ph3)**

## *What Action is Being Proposed in Amendment 43?*

### **ACTION 1. Revise the Process to Determine the Annual Catch Limits (ACL) for Red Snapper**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The commercial and recreational ACLs for red snapper are zero. The process and formula established in Snapper Grouper Amendment 28 specifies current fishing year annual catch limits if the National Marine Fisheries Service determines that the previous year's estimated red snapper landings and dead discards are less than the acceptable biological catch.

**Alternative 2.** Remove the process and equation used to determine the red snapper ACL as specified in Snapper Grouper Amendment 28. Specify a total annual catch limit equal to 23,623 fish. Commercial annual catch limit equals 69,360 pounds (whole weight) and recreational annual catch limit equals 16,480 fish.

**Alternative 3.** Remove the process and equation used to determine the red snapper ACL as specified in Snapper Grouper Amendment 28. Specify a total annual catch limit equal to 44,411 fish. Commercial annual catch limit equals 130,396 pounds (whole weight) and recreational annual catch limit equals 30,982 fish.

**Alternative 4.** Remove the process and equation used to determine the red snapper ACL as specified in Snapper Grouper Amendment 28. Specify a total annual catch limit equal to 42,510 fish. Commercial annual catch limit equals 124,815 pounds (whole weight) and recreational annual catch limit equals 29,656 fish.

**Alternative 5.** Remove the process and equation used to determine the red snapper ACL as specified in Snapper Grouper Amendment 28. Specify a total annual catch limit equal to 79,919 fish. Commercial annual catch limit equals 234,652 pounds (whole weight) and recreational annual catch limit equals 55,753 fish.

**Note: In Alternative 2 through 5, the sector annual catch limits were calculated using the established allocation in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (2011). The allocation is 28.07% commercial and 71.93% recreational based on weight.**

## *What are Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures and Why are they Required?*

The reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) in 2007 required implementation of ACLs and accountability measures (AM) to end and/or prevent overfishing to achieve the optimum yield (OY) from a fishery. An ACL is the level of annual catch of a stock that, if met or exceeded, triggers some corrective action. The AMs are the corrective actions, and they are management controls to prevent ACLs from being exceeded and to correct overages

of ACLs if they occur. For example, a common AM is implementation of an in-season closure if catch is projected to reach the ACL. Amendment 43 includes alternatives that would revise the current ACLs for red snapper.

## **How Were the Annual Catch Limits Developed?**

The ACL for **Alternative 1 (No Action)** uses the process developed in Amendment 28, which sets the annual catch limit to zero if the accepted biological catch from the previous year is exceeded. The accepted biological catch includes landings plus an estimate of dead discards. The acceptable biological catch for **Alternative 1 (No Action)** was recommended by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee in November 2010.

The acceptable biological catch was exceeded in 2014, 2015, and 2016 (**Table S-1**) and the annual catch limit was set to zero. Proposed ACLs in **Alternative 2** through **Alternative 5** (**Table S-2**) are based on landings from 2012 to 2014 (**Table S-1**), when mini-seasons were open for red snapper. **Alternative 2** is based on the average landings from 2012 to 2014. **Alternative 3** is based on the average of landings from 2012 to 2014, multiplied by an adjustment factor intended to account for the observed population growth since 2012-2014. The adjustment factor is based on the observed increase in numbers of red snapper from a long-term scientific survey (Marine Resources Monitoring and Assessment Program, MARMAP, and Southeast Fishery Independent Survey, SEFIS)<sup>1</sup>. The scientific survey indicated the average population of red snapper increased by 1.88 when comparing the time period 2012 to 2014 to the time period 2015 to 2016 (**Figure S-1** and **Appendices K** and **L** of the draft amendment). **Alternative 4** is based on the highest observed landings that occurred in a single year from 2012 to 2014. The highest landings occurred in 2014 with 42,510 red snapper being landed. **Alternative 5** is the highest landings that occurred in a single year from 2012 to 2014, multiplied by the adjustment factor (described above).

### *What is an Annual Catch Limit?*

#### **ACL = Annual Catch Limit**

An ACL is the level of annual catch of a stock that, if met or exceeded, triggers some corrective action.

### *What is an Accountability Measure?*

#### **AM – Accountability Measure**

An AM is a corrective action or management control, established by the Council, to prevent ACLs from being exceeded and to correct overages of ACLs if they occur.

#### Examples

- *An in-season closure if catch is projected to reach the ACL*
- *Reducing the ACL by an overage that occurred the previous fishing year.*

<sup>1</sup> Video data were not available through 2016 at the time of developing this amendment.

**Table S-1.** Red snapper ABCs recommended by the SSC from projections included in SEDAR 24 (2010). Landings and estimates of dead discards of red snapper from the South Atlantic region since 2012, including during mini-seasons from 2012 to 2014. Bold values indicate landings plus dead discards exceeded the ABC.

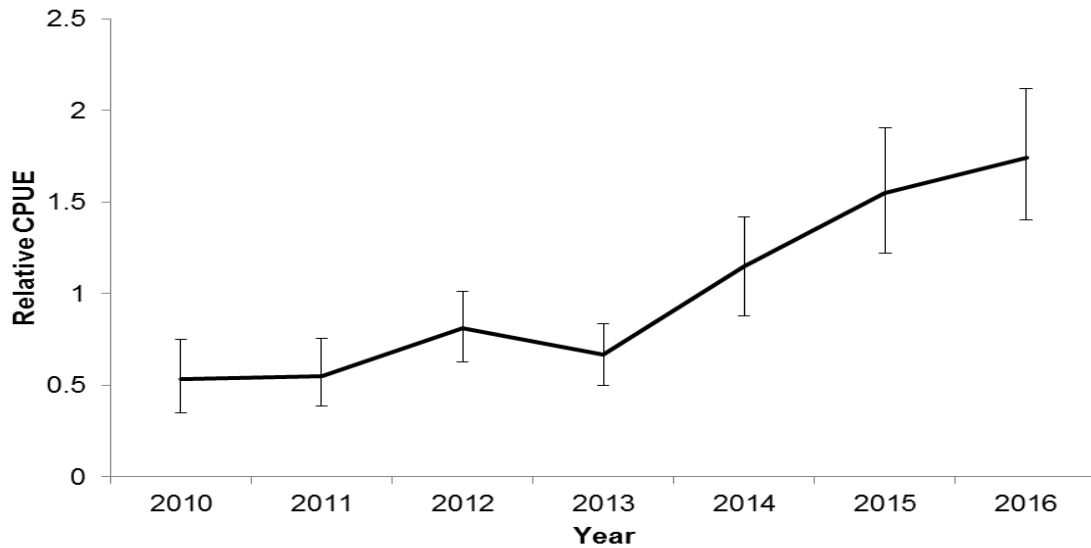
Year	Total ABC (Numbers of Fish)	Landings (Numbers of Fish)	Landings + Dead Discards* (Numbers of Fish)
2012	86,000	16,591	80,516
2013	96,000	11,767	72,881
2014	106,000	42,510	<b>205,859</b>
2015	114,000	2,850	<b>276,729</b>
2016	121,000	830	<b>407,025</b>
2017	128,000		

\*Values were reported in the SEFSC annual report on red snapper landings. Reports were presented at June Council meetings from 2013-2016.

**Table S-2.** Proposed total, commercial, and recreational red snapper ACLs for 2018 calculated in numbers of fish and whole weight.

Alternative	ACL Number	ACL Weight (ww)	Commercial ACL Weight (ww)	Recreational ACL Number
Alt 1	TBD			
Alt 2	23,623	247,097	<del>75,537</del> 69,360	16,480
Alt 3	44,411	464,539	130,396	30,982
Alt 4	42,510	444,655	124,815	29,656
Alt 5	79,919	835,953	234,652	55,753

See methods in **Appendix K** of the draft amendment for calculation.



**Figure S-1.** Relative catch per unit effort (CPUE) with error bars from a scientific study of red snapper abundance in the South Atlantic region, 2010 to 2016.

### ***Why are the Recreational ACLs Specified in Numbers of Fish and Commercial ACLs Specified in Weight?***

The current red snapper annual catch limit is set in numbers of fish in order to account for discards (SAFMC 17A 2010). The sector annual catch limits are apportioned based on allocation percentages determined by the Council established in the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (SAFMC 2011). The methods used to develop the commercial and recreational sector allocation are included in **Appendix K** of the draft amendment. Annual catch limits for the recreational sector are specified in numbers of fish because it is a more reliable estimate for the sector than weight of fish. Surveys that estimate recreational landings collect information on numbers of fish and convert those numbers to weights using biological samples. The commercial sector’s annual catch limit is set in pounds of fish because that is how the commercial sector reports landings and thus weight is a more accurate representation of commercial landings.

### ***What are the Projected Seasons?***

Based on preliminary catch estimates from 2017, a mini-season would **not** occur under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** because the 2017 acceptable biological catch has been exceeded. Mini-seasons could occur if **Alternative 2** through **5** are chosen. Based on the season start date established in Amendment 28, the recreational season will start the second Friday in July and commercial season will start the second Monday in July. For 2018, if Alternative 2 through 5 are selected the start date would be July 13 for recreational sector and July 9 for the commercial sector. **Tables S-3** and **S-4** have the projected closure dates for the recreational and commercial sectors. The “Predicted Landings” scenario is a prediction of future landings based on recent catches, and the



“High Landings” scenario is an adjusted catch prediction using a 1.88 adjustment factor following the assumption of a larger stock size. The recreational season will be announced prior to the season starting. The recreational season can be delayed in the event of a tropical storm or hurricane affecting the Council’s area of authority. The commercial season will end when landings are projected to be met.

**Table S-3.** Predicted closure dates (number of open days) for the recreational sector under the different proposed ACL alternatives for 2018.

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
ACL	TBD	16,480 Fish	30,982 Fish	29,656 Fish	55,753 Fish
Predicted Landings	TBD	21-Jul (4)	28-Jul (7)	28-Jul (7)	15-Sep (28)
High Landings	TBD	15-Jul (2)	21-Jul (4)	21-Jul (4)	29-Jul (8)

**Table S-4.** Predicted closure dates for the commercial sector under the different proposed ACL alternatives for 2018.

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
ACL		69,360 lbs ww	130,396 lbs ww	124,815 lbs ww	234,652 lbs ww
Predicted Landings	TBD	17-Sep	No Closure	No Closure	No Closure
High Landings	TBD	23-Aug	26-Nov	21-Oct	No Closure

### *What are the Expected Effects?*

**Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would result in no commercial or recreational harvest of red snapper allowed in 2018 due to exceeding the ABC in 2017. While allowing no harvest might be biologically beneficial to a stock, it is expected that the resulting level of dead discards would continue to increase. The long-term biological effects of continued high bycatch and resulting mortality on the red snapper stock are unknown because the red snapper stock has continued to increase after high levels of bycatch based on survey data. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** has the least economic and social benefits and a continued administrative burden to calculate the ACL each year. **Alternatives 3 and 5** propose ACLs above recent catch levels since they are adjusted to account for perceived recent population growth by a factor of 1.88. Therefore, these alternatives might result in negative biological effects over the status quo since it is not known how the stock might be impacted and whether such levels of harvest could result in overfishing. **Alternative 5** has the largest economic benefit and most social benefits followed by **Alternative 3**. **Alternatives 2 and 4** would be less likely to result in negative biological effects than **Alternatives 3 and 5** since **Alternatives 2 and 4** propose ACLs based on 2012-2014 catch levels and data suggest red snapper abundance increased from 2014 levels by 35%

in 2015 and an additional 12% in 2016. **Alternative 4** has greater economic and social benefits than **Alternative 2** but less than **Alternatives 3** and **5**.

**References:**

Sauls, B.J., R.P. Cody, and A.J. Strelcheck. 2017. Survey method for estimating red snapper landings in a high-effort recreational fishery managed with a small annual catch limit. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management* 37: 302-313.

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SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2011. Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment for the South Atlantic Region with Final Environmental Impact Statement, Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, Regulatory Impact Review, and Social Impact Assessment/Fishery Impact Statement. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, Charleston, S.C. 29405.

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Siegfried, K.I., E.H. Williams, K.W. Shertzer, and L.G. Coggins. 2016. Improving stock assessments through data prioritization. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 73: 1703-1711.

## Public Hearing Information

<b>August 3, 2017 6 p.m.</b>	<b>Webinar</b> Q&A Session Registration required: <a href="http://www.safmc.net">www.safmc.net</a>
<b>August 8, 2017 6 p.m.</b>	<b>Webinar Public Hearing</b> Registration required: <a href="http://www.safmc.net">www.safmc.net</a>
<b>August 10, 2017 10 a.m.</b>	<b>Webinar Public Hearing</b> Registration required: <a href="http://www.safmc.net">www.safmc.net</a>
<b>August 10, 2017 6 p.m.</b>	<b>Webinar Public Hearing</b> Registration required: <a href="http://www.safmc.net">www.safmc.net</a>

Public hearing summary, draft amendment, presentation and video available at: <http://www.safmc.net/meetings/public-hearing-and-scoping-meeting-schedule>

**Submitting Written Comments:**

*Note: The Council requests that written comments be submitted using the online public comment form, available at:*

<https://safmc.wufoo.com/forms/rtl61y31uqm56o/>

**Comments by mail:**

Gregg Waugh, Executive Director, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201  
North Charleston, SC 29405

**Comments by fax:**

843/769-4520

**Comments received by 5:00 PM on August 15, 2017, will be included in the Public Input Overview under the Snapper Grouper Committee for the September 2017 Council Meeting Briefing Book and included in the administrative record.**

**Comments received between August 16 and September 14 at 12:00 PM will still be available for the Council members and public to view on the SAFMC website and included in the administrative record, but will not be included in the Public Input Overview for the Briefing Book.**