

# Amendment 41 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region



## Scoping Document

January 13, 2016



Amendment 41 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 41) would address fishing level specifications for mutton snapper in response to the new stock assessment and revise management measures.

**Written comments on Amendment 41 will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on February 10, 2016.** Comments may be submitted in writing at the Council address on the back of this document. Comments may also be submitted via fax (843-769-4520) or email ([Mike.Collins@safmc.net](mailto:Mike.Collins@safmc.net)) with the subject "Am 41 Scoping".

# Why is the Council Considering Action?

An update to the stock assessment for mutton snapper in the southeastern U.S. (SEDAR 15A Update 2015) was conducted in 2015 with data through 2013. The South Atlantic Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the results at their April 28-30, 2015 meeting and made fishing level recommendations.

Mutton snapper are considered a single stock throughout South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. The Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011) established a jurisdictional allocation between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils for the mutton snapper acceptable biological catch (ABC) based on the jurisdictional boundary between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils: the South Atlantic Council was allocated 82% of the ABC and the Gulf Council received 18% of the ABC (established using 50% of average landings from 1990-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008). The following parameters (pounds whole weight; lbs ww) were implemented for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment:

Parameter	Value
OFL	1,515,300
ABC	926,600
ACL	926,600
Comm ACL	157,707
Rec ACL	768,893
Rec ACT	668,937

The current commercial annual catch limit (ACL) is 157,743 lbs ww and the recreational ACL is 768,857 lbs ww (*NOTE: The commercial allocation in the Comp ACL was 17.02% and the recreational allocation was 82.98%. However the ACLs that were implemented were calculated using this allocation to 6 decimal places instead of 2).*

The Council needs to take action to implement biological benchmarks and fishing levels recommended by the latest stock assessment update. However, **based on improvements to the modeling approach and additional years of data, the 2015 assessment estimated a smaller adult population compared to the 2008 assessment. Because of this finding the assessment**

## ***Purpose for Action***

The *purpose* of this amendment is to update the acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit, maximum sustainable yield, minimum stock size threshold, optimum yield, and revise management measures for the mutton snapper component of the snapper grouper fishery based on the results of the most recent stock assessment utilizing data through 2013.

## ***Need for Action***

The *need* for the amendment is to base mutton snapper management measures on the best scientific information available in order to achieve and maintain OY and to prevent overfishing while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

**recommends a lower acceptable biological catch (ABC) to maintain sustainable harvest.** Consequently, the Council may modify existing management measures for mutton snapper to achieve the desired level of harvest.

The fishing level recommendations from the Council’s SSC, based on the update to the mutton snapper stock assessment, are:

Mutton Snapper recommendations from SEDAR 15A Update (2015).

Criteria	Deterministic	Probabilistic
Overfished evaluation	Not overfished: $SSB/SSB_{F30\%}=1.13$	
Overfishing evaluation	Not overfishing: $F/F_{30\%SPR}=0.65$	
MFMT ( $F_{30\%SPR}$ )	0.18	
$SSB_{30\%SPR}$ (lbs ww females)	4,649,200	
MSST (lbs ww females)	4,137,788	
Y at $F_{30\%SPR}$ (MSY proxy, lbs ww)	912,500	
Y at $F_{40\%SPR}$ (lbs ww)	874,000	
ABC Control Rule Adjustment		20%
P-Star		30%

OVERFISHING LEVEL (OFL) RECOMMENDATIONS				
Year	Landed (lbs ww)	Discards (lbs ww)	Landed (numbers)	Discards (numbers)
2016	713,492	54,005	148,995	29,298
2017	751,711	55,962	164,150	29,660
2018	793,823	56,994	173,656	30,071
2019	835,318	58,170	180,716	30,430
2020	850,077	58,857	184,868	30,780

ABC RECOMMENDATIONS ( $P^* = 0.03$ )				
Year	Landed (lbs ww)	Discards (lbs ww)	Landed (numbers)	Discards (numbers)
2016	692,000	52,800	145,400	28,600
2017	717,200	53,700	157,500	28,400
2018	746,800	53,900	164,500	28,300
2019	774,400	54,400	169,300	28,300
2020	798,300	54,500	172,700	28,300

Old South Atlantic ABC = 926,600 lbs ww

New South Atlantic ABC = 567,440 lbs ww

# Possible Actions and Alternatives

## Action 1. Specify Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for mutton snapper

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic equals the yield produced by  $F_{MSY}$ .  $F_{30\%SPR}$  is used as the  $F_{MSY}$  proxy.

**Alternative 2.** Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) equals the yield produced by  $F_{MSY}$  or the  $F_{MSY}$  proxy. MSY and  $F_{MSY}$  are recommended by the most recent SEDAR/SSC.

Alternatives	Equation	$F_{MSY}$	MSY Values (lbs whole weight)
Alternative 1 (No Action)	MSY equals the yield produced by $F_{MSY}$ . $F_{30\%SPR}$ is used as the $F_{MSY}$ proxy.	$F_{30\%SPR}$	Not specified
Alternative 2	MSY equals the yield produced by $F_{MSY}$ or the $F_{MSY}$ proxy. MSY and $F_{MSY}$ are recommended by the most recent SEDAR/SSC.	$F_{30\%SPR}$	912,500

Discussion:

Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) is the largest long-term average catch that can be taken from a stock under prevailing ecological and environmental conditions. MSY for snapper grouper species was initially specified in Amendment 11 (SAFMC 1998). At that time, MSY was unknown for mutton snapper due to a lack of data. When a stock assessment is conducted; however, the model produces estimates of MSY. The SEDAR 15A (2008) assessment produced an MSY estimate that was not officially adopted by the Council, however. The Council needs to take action to adopt the new definition and value for MSY that resulted from the updated assessment (SEDAR 15A update 2015). Selecting a definition for MSY would allow for subsequent revisions to that value when the stock assessment is updated or a new assessment is performed without the Council having to take action. **Alternative 2** would provide that option.

## Action 2. Specify Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) for mutton snapper

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The minimum stock size threshold (MSST) for mutton snapper is  $MSST = SSB_{MSY} ((1-M) \text{ or } 0.5, \text{ whichever is greater})$ .

**Alternative 2.** Minimum stock size threshold (MSST) = 50% of  $SSB_{MSY}$

**Alternative 3.** Minimum stock size threshold (MSST) = 75% of  $SSB_{MSY}$

Alternatives	MSST Equation	M	MSST (lbs ww)
1 (No Action)	$MSST = SSB_{MSY} ((1-M) \text{ or } 0.5, \text{ whichever is greater})$ .	0.11	Not specified
2	$MSST = 50\% \text{ of } SSB_{MSY}$	0.17	2,324,600
3	$MSST = 75\% \text{ of } SSB_{MSY}$	0.17	3,486,900

### Discussion:

The Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) is the level below which a stock is considered overfished. The SEDAR 15A (2008) assessment produced an MSST estimate that was not officially adopted by the Council hence a value has not yet been specified. The assessment update estimated natural mortality (M) for mutton snapper at 0.17. When the natural mortality rate is low, less than 0.25, even small fluctuations in biomass due to natural variations not related to fishing mortality may cause a stock to vary between an overfished or rebuilt condition. When a species is identified as overfished, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires that a plan be implemented to rebuild the stock. The Council changed the definition for MSST through Regulatory Amendment 21 (effective November 6, 2014) for select snapper grouper species with low natural mortality from  $MSST = SSB_{MSY} * ((1-M) \text{ or } 0.5, \text{ whichever is greater})$  to  $MSST = 75\% SSB_{MSY}$ . Other snapper grouper amendments changed MSST to 75%  $SSB_{MSY}$  for snowy grouper, golden tilefish, and red grouper (Amendments 15A, 15B, and 24, respectively). The snapper grouper species with low natural mortality rates addressed in Regulatory Amendment 21 were red snapper, blueline tilefish, gag, black grouper, yellowtail snapper, vermilion snapper, red porgy, and greater amberjack. Redefining MSST for these species was done to help prevent unnecessary overfished designations when small drops in biomass are due to natural variation in recruitment or other environmental variables, and ensure that rebuilding plans are applied to stocks when truly appropriate. The estimated natural mortality for mutton snapper from the stock assessment update is within the range of natural mortality values for species addressed in Regulatory Amendment 21 (0.08 – 0.23).

### Action 3. Revise Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and Optimum Yield (OY) for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic region

**Alternative 1 (No action).** The current ABC and OY for mutton snapper is 926,600 lbs ww. The current commercial ACL is 157,743 lbs ww and the recreational ACL is 768,857 lbs ww. (NOTE: The commercial allocation in the Comp ACL was 17.02% and the recreational allocation was 82.98%. However the ACLs that were implemented were calculated using this allocation to 6 decimal places instead of 2).

**Alternative 2.** The jurisdictional allocation for the South Atlantic is 82% of the acceptable biological catch (ABC). Specify annual catch limits (ACLs) and optimum yield (OY) for the South Atlantic using the existing sector allocations (17.02% commercial and 82.98% recreational) and specify the recreational ACL in numbers of fish:

**Sub-alternative 2a.** ACL = OY = ABC.

**Sub-alternative 2b.** ACL = OY = 95% ABC.

**Sub-alternative 2c.** ACL = OY = 90% ABC.

Discussion:

**Table 1** shows proposed commercial and recreational ACLs for each of the proposed sub-alternatives under **Alternative 2**.

**Table 1.** Proposed acceptable biological catch values and annual catch limits for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic based on sub-alternatives 2a through 2c under Action 3. An average weight of 4.13 lbs was used to convert the recreational ACL from pounds to numbers of fish.

ACL = OY = ABC (Sub-alternative 2a)						
Year	ABC (SA and Gulf)	SA ABC (lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)	comm ACL (lbs ww)	rec ACL (lbs ww)	rec ACL (numbers)
2016	692,000	567,440	567,440	96,578	470,862	114,010
2017	717,200	588,104	588,104	100,095	488,009	118,162
2018	746,800	612,376	612,376	104,226	508,150	123,039
2019	774,400	635,008	635,008	108,078	526,930	127,586
2020	798,300	654,606	654,606	111,414	543,192	131,523
ACL = OY = 95% ABC (Sub-alternative 2b)						
2016	692,000	567,440	539,068	91,749	447,319	108,310
2017	717,200	588,104	558,699	95,091	463,608	112,254
2018	746,800	612,376	581,757	99,015	482,742	116,887
2019	774,400	635,008	603,258	102,674	500,583	121,207
2020	798,300	654,606	621,876	105,843	516,032	124,947
ACL = OY = 90% ABC (Sub-alternative 2c)						
2016	692,000	567,440	510,696	86,920	423,776	102,609
2017	717,200	588,104	529,294	90,086	439,208	106,346
2018	746,800	612,376	551,138	93,804	457,335	110,735
2019	774,400	635,008	571,507	97,271	474,237	114,827
2020	798,300	654,606	589,145	100,273	488,873	118,371

Source: M. Errigo, SAFMC staff.

Proposed commercial ACLs for 2016 range from 96,578 to 86,920 lbs ww under **Sub-alternatives 2a through 2c (Table 1)**. Average commercial landings from 2010 to 2014 are 76,881 lbs ww (**Table 2**), well below the range of proposed commercial ACLs. If commercial catch rates are similar to those in 2010-2014, the commercial ACL would not be landed under any of the proposed alternatives.

Proposed recreational ACLs (in numbers of fish) for 2016 range from 114,010 fish to 102,609 fish, whereas the average of recreational landings from 2010-2014 is 112,050 fish (**Table 2**). Hence it is possible that the recreational ACL will be harvested once implemented if harvest rates are comparable to those in 2010-2014. The Council is considering changes to the recreational bag limit to spread out the harvest and prevent a recreational closure.

**Table 2.** Commercial and recreational landings of mutton snapper, by sector, for the South Atlantic region, 2010-2014.

<b>South Atl. Mutton Snapper Landings</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Recreational</b>		<b>Commercial</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>number</b>	<b>lbs ww</b>	<b>lbs ww</b>	<b>lbs ww</b>
2010	130,249	477,647	74,833	552,480
2011	60,151	251,446	66,160	317,606
2012	86,108	505,583	77,231	582,814
2013	126,241	660,449	75,010	735,459
2014	157,501	538,122	91,173	629,295
<b>Mean</b>	<b>112,050</b>	<b>486,650</b>	<b>76,881</b>	<b>563,531</b>

## Action 4. Revise Recreational Annual Catch Target (ACT) for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic region

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The current ACT is 668,906 lbs ww and applies to mutton snapper throughout the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. The ACT = recreational ACL\*(1-PSE) or ACL\*0.5, whichever is greater, and where Percent Standard Error (PSE) = 13% = average PSE 2005-2009 (for South Atlantic only).

**Alternative 2.** Revise the annual catch target (ACT) for mutton snapper for the recreational sector and specify the recreational ACT in numbers of fish.

**Sub-alternative 2a.** ACT = recreational ACL\*(1-PSE) or ACL\*0.5, whichever is greater.

**Sub-alternative 2b.** ACT =85% recreational ACL.

**Sub-alternative 2c.** ACT = 75% recreational ACL.

Year	PSE
2010	10.2
2011	15.2
2012	21.2
2013	15.1
2014	17.9
<b>Average</b>	<b>15.9</b>

Note: PSE = Percent Standard Error. The PSE is a measure of precision presented for recreational estimates. The higher the PSE, the less precise the estimate.

### Discussion:

Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) can be used to prevent ACLs from being exceeded. In managing the snapper grouper fishery, however, Council has chosen not to use ACTs to trigger accountability measures because it is anticipated that improvements in reporting will significantly reduce management uncertainty. **Table 3** shows recreational ACTs for mutton snapper under each of the proposed ACL alternatives from Action 3.

**Table 3.** Proposed recreational annual catch targets (ACTs) in pounds (lbs ww) and numbers of fish for each of the proposed annual catch limit alternatives under Action 3.

ACL = OY = ABC								
Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Rec ACL (lbs ww)	Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2a)	Rec ACT (#s) (2a)	Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2b)	Rec ACT (#s) (2b)	Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2c)	Rec ACT (#s) (2c)
2015	545,218	452,422	380,487	92,128	384,559	93,114	339,316	82,159
2016	567,440	470,862	395,995	95,883	400,232	96,908	353,146	85,508
2017	588,104	488,009	410,415	99,374	414,807	100,438	366,007	88,622
2018	612,376	508,150	427,354	103,476	431,927	104,583	381,112	92,279
2019	635,008	526,930	443,148	107,300	447,890	108,448	395,197	95,689
2020	654,606	543,192	456,825	110,611	461,713	111,795	407,394	98,643



<b>ACL = OY = 95%ABC</b>								
<b>Year</b>	<b>Total ACL (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Rec ACL (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2a)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (#s) (2a)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2b)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (#s) (2b)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2c)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (#s) (2c)</b>
2015	517,957	429,801	361,462	87,521	365,331	88,458	322,351	78,051
2016	539,068	447,319	376,195	91,088	380,221	92,063	335,489	81,232
2017	558,699	463,608	389,895	94,406	394,067	95,416	347,706	84,190
2018	581,757	482,742	405,986	98,302	410,331	99,354	362,057	87,665
2019	603,258	500,583	420,990	101,935	425,496	103,026	375,437	90,905
2020	621,876	516,032	433,983	105,081	438,628	106,205	387,024	93,710
<b>ACL = OY = 90%ABC</b>								
<b>Year</b>	<b>Total ACL (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Rec ACL (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2a)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (#s) (2a)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2b)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (#s) (2b)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2c)</b>	<b>Rec ACT (#s) (2c)</b>
2015	490,696	407,180	346,103	83,802	346,103	83,802	305,385	73,943
2016	510,696	423,776	360,209	87,218	360,209	87,218	317,832	76,957
2017	529,294	439,208	373,327	90,394	373,327	90,394	329,406	79,759
2018	551,138	457,335	388,734	94,124	388,734	94,124	343,001	83,051
2019	571,507	474,237	403,101	97,603	403,101	97,603	355,678	86,121
2020	589,145	488,873	415,542	100,615	415,542	100,615	366,655	88,778

## **Action 5. Designate spawning season during which commercial and recreational management measures for mutton snapper should apply**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The spawning season for mutton snapper is designated as May-June.

**Alternative 2.** For regulatory purposes, the “spawning season” shall be designated as the following months. For regulatory purposes, all other months constitute the “regular season”.

**Sub-alternative 2a.** April-June

**Sub-alternative 2b.** April-July

**Sub-alternative 2c.** June-July

**Sub-alternative 2d.** May-July

**Sub-alternative 2e.** May-August

### Discussion:

Amendment 4 (SAFMC 1991) designated May and June as the spawning months for mutton snapper and established regulations to prevent overharvesting of spawning aggregations. In recent years, however, fishermen and law enforcement personnel have approached the Council with concerns about overexploitation of mutton snapper while they are aggregated to spawn. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) has received similar comments since 2007. FWC staff has regularly heard comments about reducing recreational bag limits and commercial trip limits. Stakeholders are particularly concerned about how many mutton snapper are harvested during the spawning season. Hence, the Council is coordinating with FWC to implement compatible regulations for mutton snapper in state and federal waters that would address stakeholder concerns and benefit the mutton snapper resource. A necessary step to achieving compatible regulations is to designate the time frame during which more restrictive regulations would apply, i.e., the “spawning months” vs. “regular season.”

Mutton snapper are known to form aggregations when they spawn (Figuerola et al. 1997). Burton et al. (2005 and references therein) indicate that mutton snapper spawning occurs from May through July at Riley’s Hump and peaks in June, as indicated by gonadosomatic indices (M. Burton, unpubl. data). Fish begin to aggregate for spawning around the full moon (Burton et al 2005). Individuals have been observed in spawning condition in the U.S. Caribbean from February through July (Erdman 1976). Some spawning occurs during February to June off Puerto Rico, but spawning peaks during the week following the full moon in April and May. Spawning aggregations are known to occur north of St. Thomas, USVI, and south of St. Croix, USVI, in March, April, and May (Rielinger 1999).

Graham et al (2008) report evidence of a significant decline in catch-per-unit effort, mean landings and inter-annual median lengths of mutton snapper in Belize, due to overexploitation at a spawning aggregation in Gladden Spit. The authors suggest that “a precautionary approach to spawning aggregation management is warranted that provides full protection from fishing to enhance population persistence. The findings also highlight the need for substantially greater enforcement and long-term fisheries monitoring under a comprehensive regional management strategy.”

## **Action 6. Modify Mutton Snapper Recreational Bag Limit in the South Atlantic**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Mutton snapper is part of the aggregate 10 snapper bag limit in the South Atlantic. In the South Atlantic, the 10 snapper-per-person aggregate includes all snapper species in the snapper grouper management unit except red snapper and vermilion snapper. Cubera snapper less than 30 inches total length (TL) are included in the 10 fish bag limit. The aggregate 10 snapper bag limit includes a maximum of 2 cubera snapper per person (not to exceed 2 per/vessel) for fish 30 inches TL or larger off Florida. Note: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and the State of Florida regulations include mutton snapper in the 10 snapper bag limit.

**Alternative 2.** Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit in the South Atlantic, but specify a bag limit for mutton snapper during the “regular season” (i.e., non-spawning months)

**Sub-alternative 2a.** 4 fish/person/day

**Sub-alternative 2b.** 5 fish/person/day

**Sub-alternative 2c.** 10 fish/person/day

**Alternative 3.** Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit in the South Atlantic, but specify bag/vessel limits for mutton snapper during the “spawning months”

**Sub-alternative 3a.** 2 fish/person/day

**Sub-alternative 3b.** 2 fish/vessel/day

**Sub-alternative 3c.** 5 fish/vessel/day

**Sub-alternative 3d.** 10 fish/vessel/day

**Sub-alternative 3e.** 12 fish/vessel/day

**Alternative 4.** Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit in the South Atlantic, but specify bag limits for mutton snapper within the aggregate bag limit year round.

**Sub-alternative 4a.** 2 fish/person/day

**Sub-alternative 4b.** 3 fish/person/day

**Sub-alternative 4c.** 5 fish/person/day

### Discussion:

As mentioned previously, there is stakeholder concern about fishing effort on mutton snapper spawning aggregations despite the healthy status of the mutton snapper stock. In 2010, the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) recommended that the South Atlantic Council consider a spawning area closure or a seasonal closure in May and June of each year. Furthermore, the AP recommended that the mutton snapper bag limit be reduced to 3 fish per person per day. The most recent stock assessment of mutton snapper in the southeastern United States (SEDAR 15A Update 2015) indicated that mutton snapper are neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. Currently, mutton snapper is part of the 10 snapper aggregate (gray snapper, mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, Cubera snapper, queen snapper, blackfin snapper, silk snapper, dog snapper, lane snapper, and mahogany snapper). NOTE: Amendment 35 (pending approval) proposes to

remove dog snapper and mahogany snapper from the snapper grouper fishery management unit). Current management measures for mutton snapper in federal waters of the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico and state waters of Florida are shown in **Table 4**.

**Table 4.** Current recreational mutton snapper fishing regulations in State waters off Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, and the South Atlantic (June 2015).

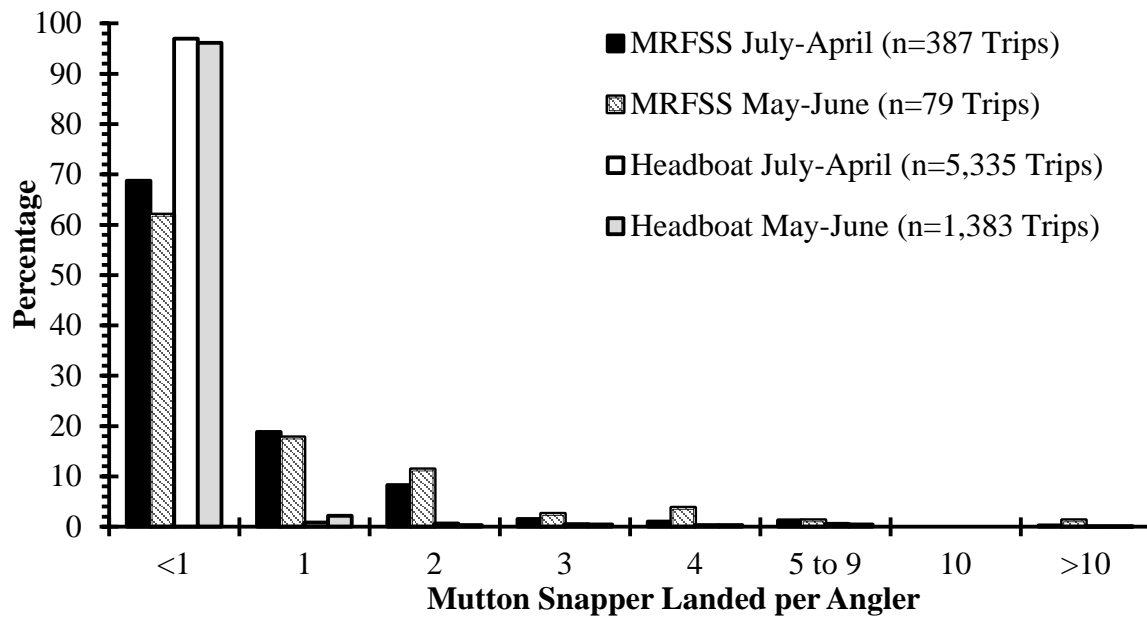
Species	Regulations	FL State Waters Gulf and South Atlantic	Federal Waters Gulf of Mexico	Federal Waters South Atlantic
Mutton Snapper	Size Limit	16" TL		
	Bag Limit	10 snapper aggregate (per person/day)		
	Season	Year round		

**Table 5** below shows landings of mutton snapper by recreational wave for 2012 and 2013. The peak of mutton snapper recreational landings occurred during the May-June spawning season (Wave 3) in the South Atlantic during 2012 and 2013. **Figure 1** shows the distribution of mutton snapper catch-per-angler for the private and charter modes (based on the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey, MRFSS) and headboat (based on the Southeast Headboat Survey) of mutton snapper for various time periods. From 2011 to 2013, most anglers caught four or fewer mutton snapper.

**Table 5.** South Atlantic recreational (private, charter, and headboat) mutton snapper landings by wave.

Year	1 (J/F)	2 (M/A)	3 (M/J)	4 (J/A)	5 (S/O)	6 (N/D)	Total
2012	46,282	102,210	182,880	77,015	27,275	34,366	470,028
2013	50,961	36,208	175,774	91,913	90,689	36,186	481,731

Source: [http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable\\_fisheries/acl\\_monitoring/index.html](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/acl_monitoring/index.html).



**Figure 1.** Distribution of South Atlantic mutton snapper landed per angler by season from the two recreational datasets (MRIP and Headboat) from 2011 to 2013. The regular season is from July to August and the spawning season is from May to June.

Estimated percent reductions in recreational landings for private recreational, charter, and headboat are shown in **Table 6**. The reductions were calculated in terms of mutton snapper numbers with respect to dataset (MRIP and headboat) and non-spawning (July to April) and spawning (May-June) seasons.

**Table 6.** Percent reductions in landings for various bag limits generated from South Atlantic recreational landings for the years 2011-2013.

Bag Limit	MRIP			Headboat		
	Jul-Apr	May-Jun	All Year	Jul-Apr	May-Jun	All Year
10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
9	0.2	1.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3
8	0.4	2.5	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.7
7	1.3	3.8	1.8	1.3	2.0	1.5
6	2.3	5.1	2.9	2.9	3.8	3.1
5	3.5	6.3	4.1	5.5	6.2	5.7
4	5.1	8.4	5.8	9.4	9.7	9.5
3	8.5	12.7	9.3	15.3	14.7	15.2
2	14.1	20.3	15.3	25.0	21.7	24.2
1	29.3	34.2	30.3	37.5	32.4	36.3

## Action 7. Modify Mutton Snapper Commercial Trip Limit in the South Atlantic

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** During the spawning season the commercial sector in the South Atlantic is restricted to 10 mutton snapper per day or 10 mutton snapper per trip, whichever is more restrictive, and sale is allowed. There is no bag or trip limit for the commercial sector in the Gulf or South Atlantic from July through April.

**Alternative 2.** Establish a commercial trip limit for mutton snapper during the “regular season” (i.e., non-spawning months) in the South Atlantic.

**Sub-alternative 2a.** 300 pounds

**Sub-alternative 2b.** 400 pounds

**Sub-alternative 2c.** 500 pounds

**Alternative 3.** Specify a commercial trip limit for mutton snapper during the “spawning months” in the South Atlantic.

**Sub-alternative 3a.** 2 fish/person/day

**Sub-alternative 3b.** 5 fish/person/day

**Sub-alternative 3c.** 2 fish/vessel/day

**Sub-alternative 3d.** 5 fish/vessel/day

**Sub-alternative 3e.** 10 fish/vessel/day

**Sub-alternative 3f.** 12 fish/vessel/day

### Discussion:

This action considers alternatives for mutton snapper commercial trip limits in the South Atlantic during the “regular season” (i.e., non-spawning months) and during the “spawning season”. Current commercial fishing regulations for mutton snapper are detailed in **Table 7**. During May and June, the commercial sector in the South Atlantic is restricted to 10 mutton snapper per day or 10 mutton snapper per trip, whichever is more restrictive, and sale is allowed. There is no bag or trip limit for the commercial sector in the Gulf or South Atlantic during the July-April regular season.

**Table 7.** Current commercial mutton snapper fishing regulations in State waters off Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, and the South Atlantic (June 2015).

Species	Regulations	State Waters Gulf and South Atlantic	Federal Waters Gulf of Mexico	Federal Waters South Atlantic
<b>Mutton Snapper</b>	Size Limit	16” TL		
	Trip Limit	None		
	Closed Season	None		
	Bag Limit	May-June: Restricted to 10 fish/person/day or trip	None	May-June: Restricted to 10 fish/person/day or trip

**Table 8** shows commercial landings of mutton snapper by gear type from 2004-2013 in the South Atlantic. The predominant gear for harvesting mutton snapper in South Atlantic waters has been vertical line gear (**Table 8**). Trap gear was phased out in the Gulf in 2007; however,

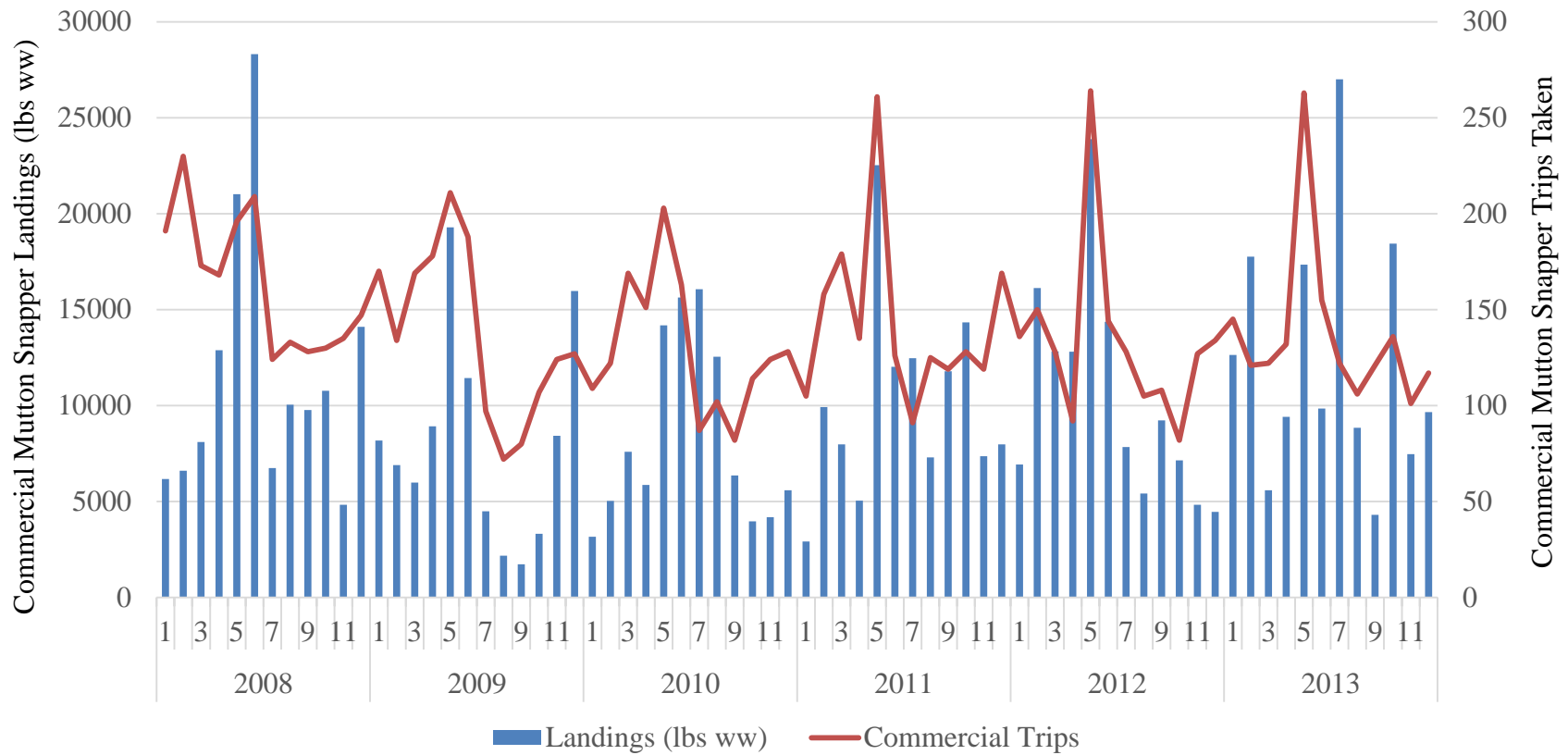
trap landings of mutton snapper are still reported in the South Atlantic and are likely bycatch from the spiny lobster fishery (Matthews et al. 2005).

**Table 8.** Commercial landings of mutton snapper by gear in the South Atlantic for 2004-2013. Landings are reported in pounds whole weight. Confidential landings are labeled as “NA”.

Year	Vertical	Traps	Diving	Other
2004	98,513	6,225	3,805	709
2005	81,551	2,662	5,023	2,436
2006	59,071	3,427	2,959	608
2007	59,955	5,918	3,770	1,343
2008	61,836	2,296	3,052	829
2009	69,088	1,873	3,429	915
2010	66,464	4,048	2,759	822
2011	54,997	7,111	3,599	372
2012	66,912	3,875	6,156	NA
2013	60,586	3,321	8,865	NA

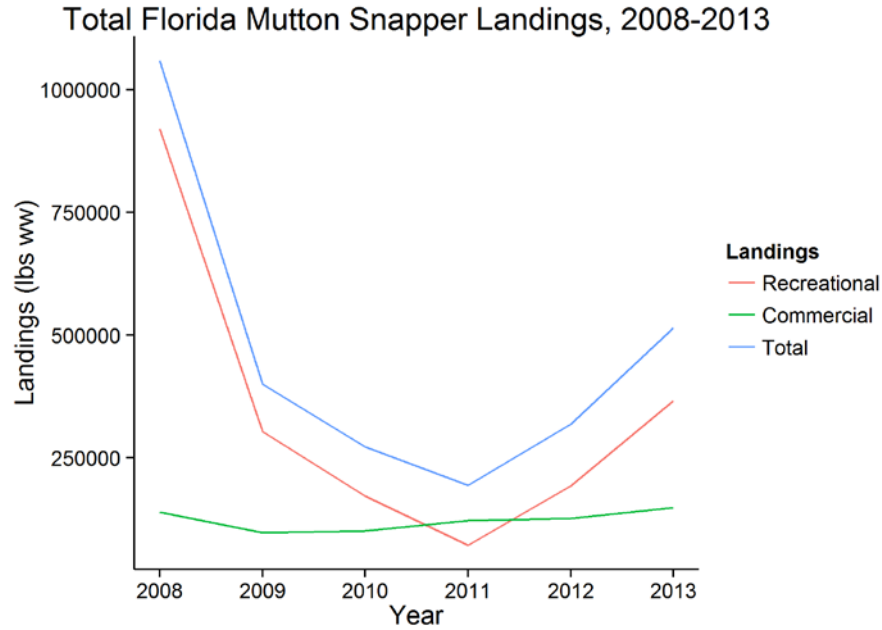
Source: Commercial ACL dataset. South Atlantic vertical line includes: hook-and-line by hand, hook-and-line power assisted (bandit) and hook-and-line troll. “Other” includes landings from the following gears: gill nets, lift nets, seine nets, and unclassified gear.

The commercial landings of mutton snapper for all Florida counties are highest during the May-June peak spawning period (**Figure 2**) despite the current restriction on harvest to 10-fish/person/day or trip, whichever is more restrictive. An examination of the monthly distribution of mutton snapper landings from commercial logbook and dealer reports shows similar trends (**Table 9**). Overall Florida landings of mutton snapper were highest in 2008, decreased through 2011, and increased again in 2012 and 2013 (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 2.** Commercial mutton snapper landings and trips by month from 2008 to 2013. Left y-axis (blue bars) is total commercial mutton snapper landings (lbs ww) for all Florida counties. Right y-axis (red line) is total commercial mutton snapper trips taken.  
 Source: NMFS SERO





**Figure 3.** Total landings of mutton snapper in Florida (lbs ww). Data are from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recreational landings and commercial trip ticket programs.

**Table 9.** Monthly distribution of mutton snapper landings from commercial logbook in the South Atlantic during 2009-2013. Source: NMFS SERO.

Month	Percent of landings (Dealer reports)	Percent of landings (Logbook)
1	5.7%	5.5%
2	6.8%	6.5%
3	5.5%	5.6%
4	6.5%	6.1%
5	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>22.6%</b>
6	<b>14.7%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>
7	9.0%	9.8%
8	8.3%	8.3%
9	5.3%	5.5%
10	5.5%	5.4%
11	6.0 %	5.6%
12	5.9%	5.1%

## What's Next?

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council will hold a Question and Answer webinar to inform the public on proposed changes and answer questions. **The webinar will be held from 6:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 21, 2016.** Go to [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) for information on how to register.

**Scoping meetings** will be held from 4-7 pm (except Morehead City hearing) on the following dates and locations. This information is also available on the Council's website.

<p><b>January 25, 2016</b>            Richmond Hill City Center            520 Cedar Street            Richmond Hill, GA 31324            Phone: 912-445-0043</p>	<p><b>January 26, 2016</b>            Hilton Garden Inn            5265 International Blvd.            N. Charleston, SC 29418            Phone: 843-308-9330</p>
<p><b>January 27, 2016</b>            Murrells Inlet Community Center            4450 Murrells Inlet Road            Murrells Inlet, SC 29576            Phone: 843-651-4152</p>	<p><b>January 28, 2016 (<i>starts at 5 pm</i>)</b>            N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries            Central District Office            5285 Highway 70 West            Morehead City, NC 28557            Phone: 252-726-7021</p>
<p><b>February 1, 2016</b>            Hilton Garden Inn Fort Lauderdale Airport-Cruise Port            180 SW 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue            Dania Beach/Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33004            Phone: 954-924-9204</p>	<p><b>February 2, 2016</b>            Hawks Cay            61 Hawks Cay Boulevard            Duck Key, FL 33050            Phone: 305-289-5100</p>
<p><b>February 3, 2016</b>            Marriott Key West Beachside            3841 N Roosevelt Boulevard            Key West, FL 33040            Phone: 305-296-8100</p>	<p><b>February 3, 2016</b>            International Palms Resort            1300 N Atlantic Avenue            Cocoa Beach, FL 32931            Phone: 321-783-2271</p>

**Written comments on Amendment 41 will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on February 10, 2016.** Comments may be submitted in writing at the Council address below. Comments may also be submitted via fax (843-769-4520) or email ([Mike.Collins@safmc.net](mailto:Mike.Collins@safmc.net)) with the subject "Am 41 Scoping".

Send Written Comments to:

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

For questions about the amendment contact Myra Brouwer at (843) 571-4366 or 1-866-safmc-10. You may also send emails to [Myra.Brouwer@safmc.net](mailto:Myra.Brouwer@safmc.net).