

Vision Blueprint Recreational Regulatory Amendment 26 for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Discussion Document



The Vision Blueprint Recreational Regulatory Amendment 26 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region would address specific action items in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

March 31, 2017

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

Award Number FNA15NMF4410010

Draft Purpose and Need

Purpose for Action

The purpose of this amendment is to modify recreational regulations such as aggregate bag limits, seasonal closures, and minimum size limits for species in the snapper grouper fishery.

Need for Action

The need for this amendment is to simplify and promote compatible regulations; improve access to the snapper grouper resource; improve protection for spawning fish; and reduce discards of deep-water species, black sea bass, and gray triggerfish while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse socio-economic effects for recreational fishermen in the South Atlantic region.

Action 1. Establish a recreational aggregate bag limit and recreational season for deep-water species

Alternative 1 (No Action). The following recreational aggregate bag limits and recreational seasons are in place in the South Atlantic Region:

Aggregate Snapper Bag Limit: Ten (10) snapper per person/day year-round including the following species: lane, yellowtail, gray, mutton, queen, blackfin, cubera (<30 inches; max. 2 per person but no more than 2 per vessel > 30 inches total length (TL) off Florida), and silk. The following species are excluded from the aggregate: vermilion snapper and red snapper.

Aggregate Grouper Bag Limit: Three (3) groupers per person/day including: gag¹, black¹, snowy², misty, red, scamp, yellowedge, yellowfin, yellowmouth, blueline tilefish³, sand tilefish, golden tilefish⁴, coney, graysby, red hind, and rock hind. Shallow water grouper (gag, black, red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth, red hind, rock hind, graysby, coney) harvest only allowed May 1 through December 31.

¹Maximum of 1 gag or black grouper (but not both) per person/day with harvest allowed May 1 through December 31.

²Maximum of 1 snowy grouper per vessel per day; recreational harvest allowed only May 1 through August 31 (closed September 1 through April 30)

³Blueline tilefish harvest allowed only May 1 through August 31 (closed September 1 through April 30)

⁴Maximum of 1 golden tilefish per person per day year-round

Alternative 2. Establish a 2-fish per person per day deep-water species aggregate bag limit including species in the Deep-water Complex (yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, misty grouper, queen snapper, sand tilefish, and blackfin snapper), golden tilefish, snowy grouper, and blueline tilefish.

Sub-alternative 2a. Establish a May 1 through August 31 recreational season for deep-water species.

Sub-alternative 2b. Only 1 fish per person per day within the deep-water species aggregate can be of any one species.

Alternative 3. Establish a 3-fish per person per day deep-water species aggregate bag limit including species in the Deep-water Complex (yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, misty grouper, queen snapper, sand tilefish, and blackfin snapper), golden tilefish, snowy grouper, and blueline tilefish.

Sub-alternative 3a. Establish a May 1 through August 31 recreational season for deep-water species.

Sub-alternative 3b. Only 1 fish per person per day within the deep-water species aggregate can be of any one species.

Alternative 4. Establish a 4-fish per person per day deep-water species aggregate bag limit including species in the Deep-water Complex (yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, misty grouper, queen snapper, sand tilefish, and blackfin snapper), golden tilefish, snowy grouper, and blueline tilefish.

Sub-alternative 4a. Establish a May 1 through August 31 recreational season for deep-water species.

Sub-alternative 4b. Only 1 fish per person per day within the deep-water species aggregate can be of any one species.

To Consider:

- A golden tilefish stock assessment may be undertaken in late 2017. The current assessment indicates the stock is undergoing overfishing. The Council needs to take action in 2017 to end overfishing of golden tilefish.
- Snowy grouper is under a rebuilding plan. Some of the alternatives under this action would increase the retention limit substantially for this species.
- Add alternative for single-hook rig requirement when in possession of and/or fishing for deep-water species?

Action 2. Establish a recreational aggregate bag limit for shallow-water grouper species

Alternative 1 (No Action). The following recreational aggregate bag limit is in place in the South Atlantic Region:

Aggregate Grouper Bag Limit: Three (3) groupers per person/day including: gag¹, black¹, snowy², misty, red, scamp, yellowedge, yellowfin, yellowmouth, blueline tilefish³, sand tilefish, golden tilefish⁴, coney, graysby, red hind, and rock hind. Shallow water grouper (gag, black, red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth, red hind, rock rind, graysby, coney) harvest only allowed May 1 through December 31.

¹Maximum of 1 gag or black grouper (but not both) per person/day with harvest allowed May 1 through December 31.

²Maximum of 1 snowy grouper per *vessel* per day; recreational harvest allowed only May 1 through August 31 (closed September 1 through April 30)

³Blueline tilefish harvest allowed only May 1 through August 31 (closed September 1 through April 30)

⁴Maximum of 1 golden tilefish per person per day year-round

Alternative 2. Establish a shallow-water grouper aggregate bag limit including species in the Shallow-Water Grouper complex (red hind, rock hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper), gag, black grouper, and red grouper.

Sub-alternative 2a. 1 fish per person per day.

Sub-alternative 2b. 2 fish per person per day with no more than 1 fish of any one species.

Sub-alternative 2c. 3 fish per person per day with no more than 1 fish of any one species.

Action 3. Modify the 10-snapper and 20-fish recreational aggregate bag limits

Alternative 1 (No Action). The following recreational aggregate bag limits are in place in the South Atlantic Region:

Aggregate Snapper Bag Limit: Ten (10) snapper per person/day year-round including the following species: lane, yellowtail, gray, mutton, queen, blackfin, cubera (<30 inches; max. 2 per person but no more than 2 per vessel > 30 inches total length (TL) off Florida), and silk. The following species are excluded from the aggregate: vermilion snapper and red snapper.

Aggregate for Species Without Bag Limit: Twenty (20) fish per person/day year-round including: whitebone porgy, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye porgy, scup, gray triggerfish, bar jack, almaco jack, banded rudderfish, lesser amberjack, white grunt, margate, sailor's choice, and spadefish.

Alternative 2. Establish a 20-fish aggregate limit including species in the current 20-fish aggregate in addition to those in the current 10-snapper aggregate: whitebone porgy, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye porgy, scup, gray triggerfish, bar jack, almaco jack, banded rudderfish, lesser amberjack, white grunt, margate, sailor's choice, spadefish, lane snapper, yellowtail snapper, gray snapper, mutton snapper*, and cubera snapper (<30 inches; max. 2 per person but no more than 2 per vessel > 30 inches TL off Florida).

Sub-alternative 2a. Within the 20-fish aggregate, no more than 10 fish can be gray triggerfish.

Sub-alternative 2b. Within the 20-fish aggregate, no more than 10 fish can be Atlantic spadefish.

Sub-alternative 2c. Within the 20-fish aggregate, no more than 10 fish can be of any one species.

Sub-alternative 2d. Within the 20-fish aggregate, no more than 5 fish can be of any one species.

*pending approval of Amendment 41 the daily limit in federal waters will be 5 per person.

Action 4. Modify the seasonal prohibition on recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers

Alternative 1 (No Action). Recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers (gag, black grouper, scamp, red grouper, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, red hind, rock hind, graysby, and coney) is prohibited annually in the South Atlantic EEZ from January 1 through April 30.

Alternative 2. Prohibit recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water grouper species annually by area:

Sub-alternative 2a. In federal waters off East Florida from the Georgia/Florida state boundary south to the end of the SAFMC's jurisdiction), the closure applies (month) to (month).

Sub-alternative 2b. In federal waters off Georgia and the Carolinas from the Georgia/South Carolina border north to the North Carolina/Virginia border, the closure applies (month) to (month)

Alternative 3. Prohibit recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water grouper species (excluding black grouper) south of 28° North latitude (approximately off Palm Bay, Florida):

Sub-alternative 3a. January – March (3 months)

Sub-alternative 3b. February – March (2 months)

Sub-alternative 3c. February – April (3 months)

Sub-alternative 3d. February – May (4 months)

Alternative 4. Prohibit recreational harvest and possession of black grouper in federal waters off (*specify area based on Alternative 2 above*)

Sub-alternative 4a. January – March (3 months)

Sub-alternative 4b. January

Sub-alternative 4c. February

Sub-alternative 4d. March

NOTE: Council's intent was to explore different closure for black grouper off Florida.

Alternative 5. Prohibit recreational harvest and possession of red grouper in federal waters off (*specify area based on Alternative 2 above*)

Sub-alternative 5a. January – May (5 months)

Sub-alternative 5b. February – May (4 months)

Sub-alternative 5c. March – June (4 months)

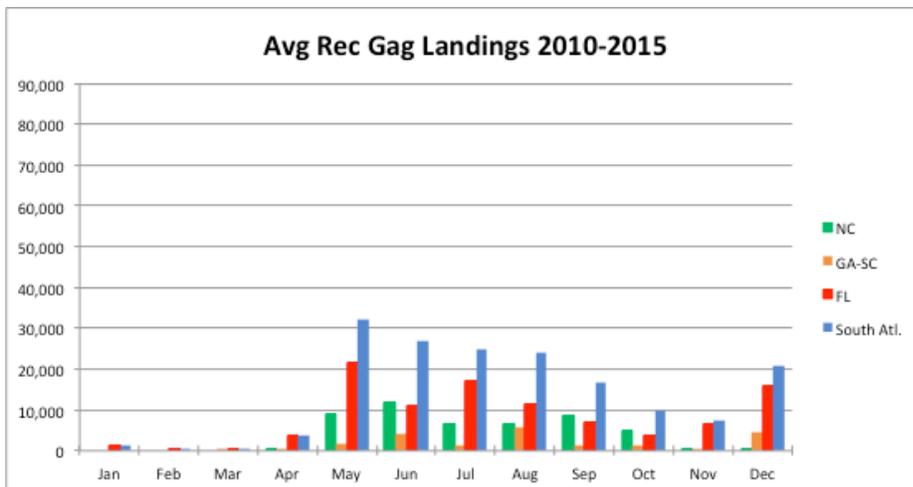
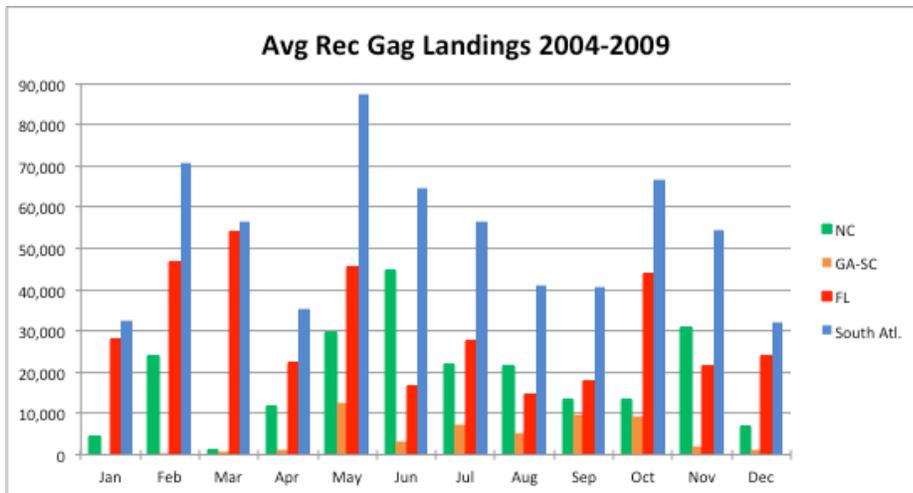
NOTE: Council's intent was to explore different closure for red grouper off North Carolina.

To Consider:

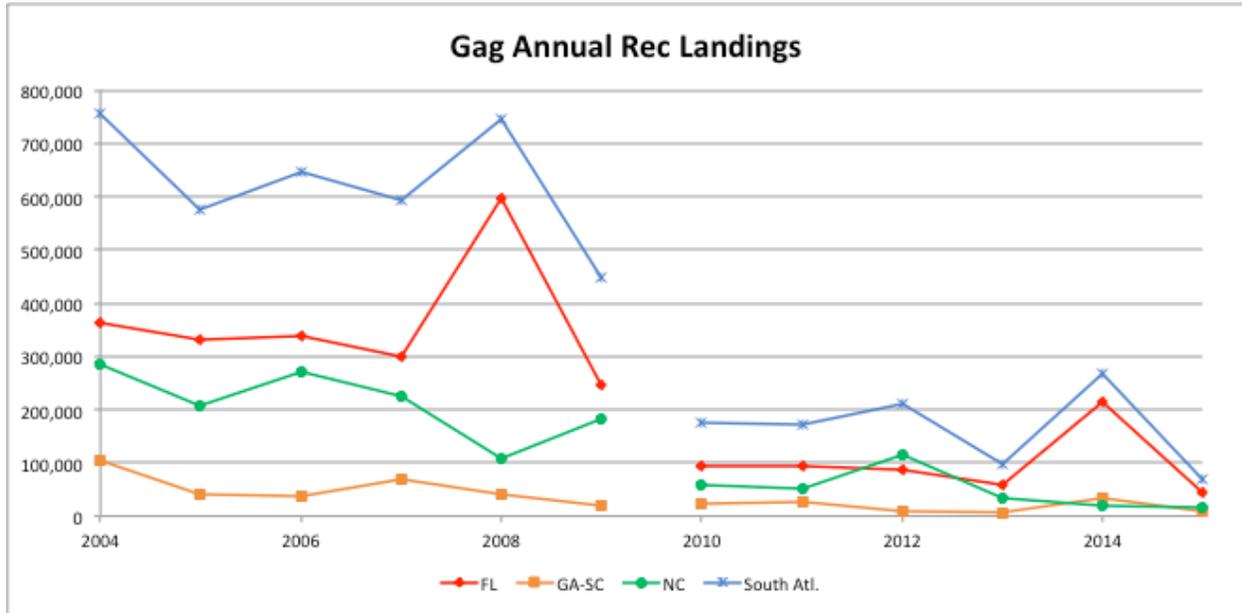
- Black grouper stock assessment is ongoing. At the data workshop, problems with species ID between gag and black grouper off South Florida were identified. This could have implications for analyses.
- Red grouper assessment will be presented to the Council in June 2017.

Preliminary Data Analysis:

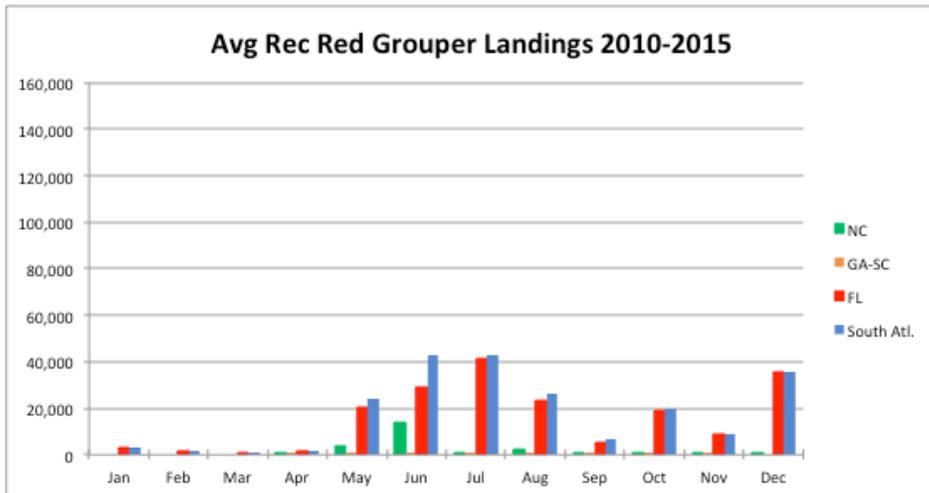
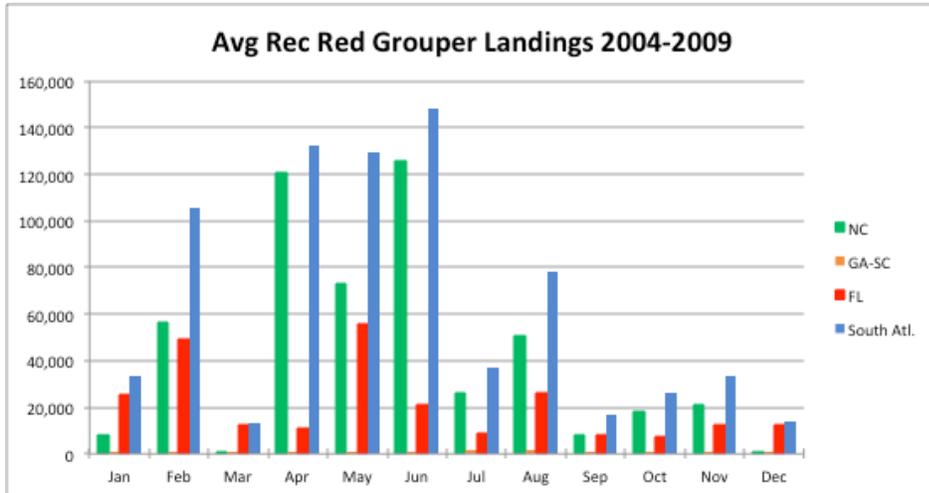
Average recreational landings (pounds whole weight; lbs ww) of **gag** are shown below by month and state (North Carolina [green], Georgia-South Carolina [orange], Florida [red], and all South Atlantic states combined [blue]) for pre-closure (2004-2009) and post-closure (2010-2015) years. For easier comparison, the range of landings (y-axis) was kept the same for both figures (Source: SAFMC based on MRIP data and average weights from the SEFSC).



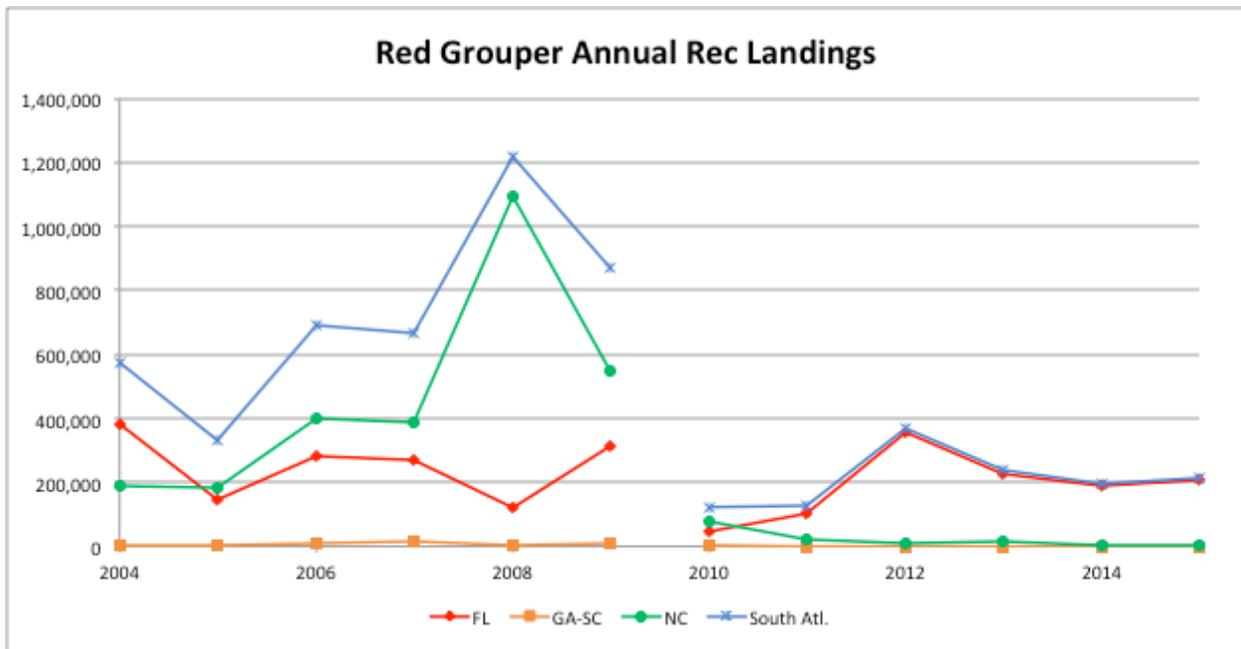
Annual recreational landings (lbs ww) of **gag** from 2014 through 2015 are shown below. The shallow water grouper closure was implemented in 2009, depicted in the figure by a break in the series.



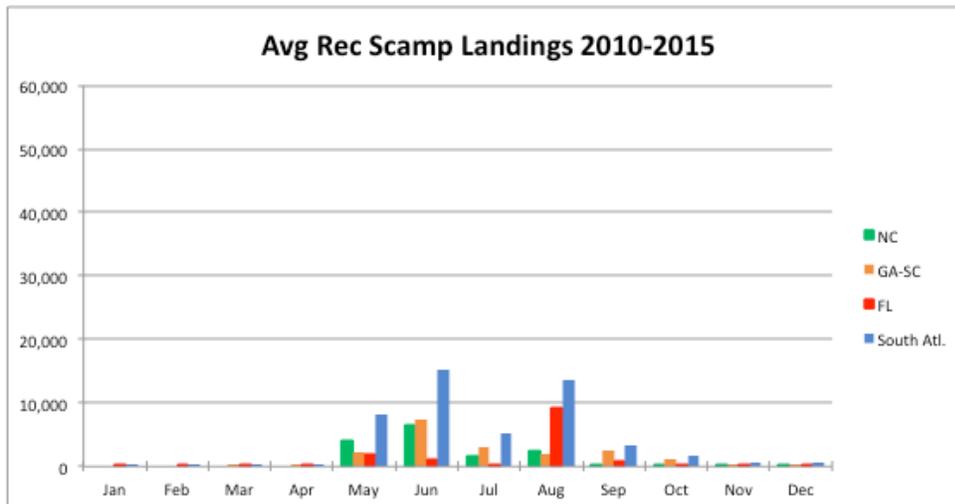
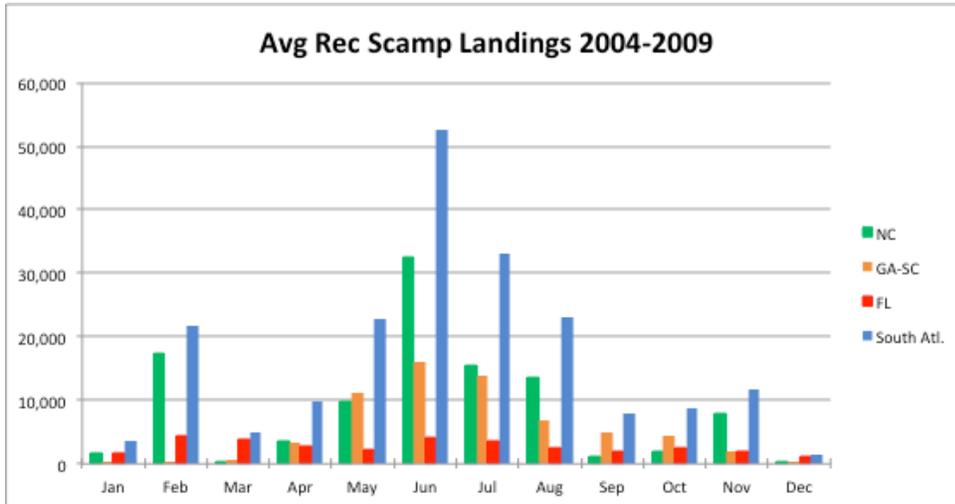
Average recreational landings (pounds whole weight; lbs ww) of **red grouper** are shown below by month and state (North Carolina (green), Georgia-South Carolina (orange), Florida (red), and all South Atlantic states combined (blue)) for pre-closure (2004-2009) and post-closure (2010-2015) years. For easier comparison, the range of landings (y-axis) was kept the same for both figures (Source: SAFMC based on MRIP data and average weights from the SEFSC).



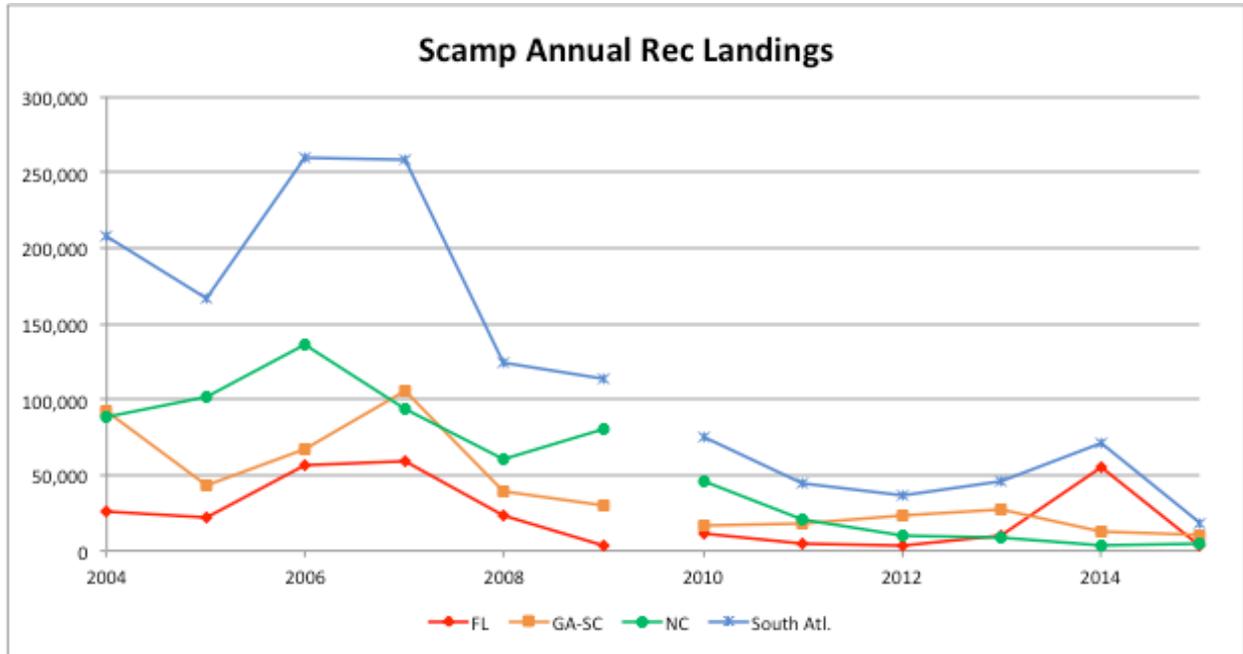
Annual recreational landings (lbs ww) of **red grouper** from 2014 through 2015 are shown below. The shallow water grouper closure was implemented in 2009, depicted in the figure by a break in the series.



Average recreational landings (pounds whole weight; lbs ww) of **scamp** are shown below by month and state (North Carolina (green), Georgia-South Carolina (orange), Florida (red), and all South Atlantic states combined (blue)) for pre-closure (2004-2009) and post-closure (2010-2015) years. For easier comparison, the range of landings (y-axis) was kept the same for both figures (Source: SAFMC based on MRIP data and average weights from the SEFSC).



Annual recreational landings (lbs ww) of **scamp** from 2014 through 2015 are shown below. The shallow water grouper closure was implemented in 2009, depicted in the figure by a break in the series.

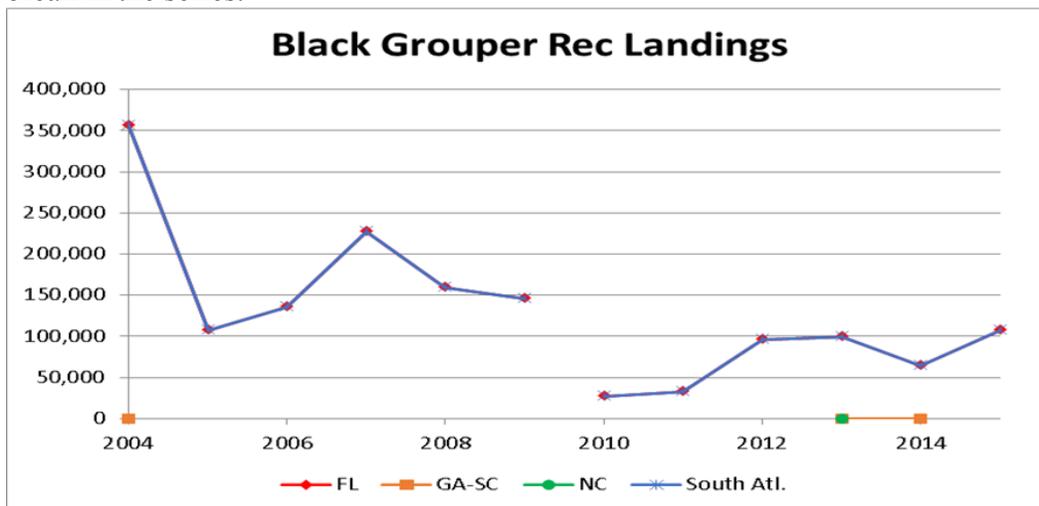


The table below shows the distribution of recreational black grouper landings from 2004 to 2015. Type “A” landings are based on intercepts where the species was caught and brought back to the dock in a form that could be identified by trained interviewers. “B1” landings are those based on angler information, where the species was caught and killed but was not available for interviewer identification. On average, the majority of black grouper recreational harvest is type “A”. Also shown below is the distribution of black grouper recreational harvest in Florida, with the majority attributed to the Florida Keys.

Year	FLE (26.4%)		Keys (73.6%)		All FL	
	% A	% B1	% A	% B1	% A	% B1
2004	94.8	5.2	99.6	0.4	99.0	1.0
2005	61.7	38.3	99.7	0.3	83.3	16.7
2006	100.0	0.0	91.1	8.9	94.4	5.6
2007	100.0	0.0	99.9	0.1	99.9	0.1
2008	100.0	0.0	70.6	29.4	75.8	24.2
2009	8.2	91.8	100.0	0.0	68.1	31.9
2010	100.0	0.0	97.8	2.2	99.3	0.7
2011	16.9	83.1	100.0	0.0	55.3	44.7
2012	86.6	13.4	100.0	0.0	87.7	12.3
2013	27.7	72.3	100.0	0.0	63.9	36.1
2014	93.7	6.3	74.3	25.7	83.4	16.6
2015	100.0	0.0	73.9	26.1	75.3	24.7
Avg	78.2	21.8	91.7	8.3	88.1	11.9

Source: SAFMC based on MRIP data (excludes headboats).

Annual recreational landings (lbs ww) of **black grouper** from 2014 through 2015 are shown below. The shallow water grouper closure was implemented in 2009, depicted in the figure by a break in the series.



Action 5. Remove the recreational minimum size limits for deep-water snapper species

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational minimum size limit for queen snapper, silk snapper, and blackfin snapper in South Atlantic federal waters is 12 inches total length (TL).

Alternative 2. Remove the 12-inch TL recreational minimum size limit for queen snapper, silk snapper, and blackfin snapper in South Atlantic federal waters.

Action 6. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass in South Atlantic federal waters is 13 inches total length (TL).

Alternative 2. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass in South Atlantic federal waters to 12 inches TL.

Alternative 3. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass in South Atlantic federal waters to 11 inches TL.

To Consider:

- The ABC for black sea bass is based on a particular selectivity pattern. A change in the minimum size limit would change selectivity and affect the ABC.
- Black sea bass assessment results will be available in late 2017.

From Regulatory Amendment 25:

Total number of discarded Black Sea Bass from trips that occurred inside and outside of 3 miles from shore.

Year	<= 3 mi	> 3 mi
2013	1,716,353	1,094,821
2014	2,060,023	2,863,174
Avg.	1,888,188	1,978,998

Action 7. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off East Florida

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in South Atlantic federal waters off the east coast of Florida is 14 inches fork length (FL). The recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina is 12 inches FL.

Alternative 2. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off the east coast of Florida to 12 inches FL.

To Consider:

- In 2015, Snapper Grouper Amendment 29 increased the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off east Florida from 12 inches total length (TL) to 14 inches fork length (FL). The amendment also implemented a minimum size limit (for both sector) of 12 inches FL in federal waters off the remaining South Atlantic states.
- The Florida FWC reduced the minimum size limit off east Florida from 14 inches FL to 12 inches FL because fishermen indicated the 14-inch size limit was creating too many discards in South Florida.
- The minimum size limit in state waters off the West coast of Florida is 14 inches.
- The gray triggerfish stock in the Gulf of Mexico is undergoing overfishing. The Gulf Council is considering an increase in the recreational minimum size limit to 15 inches.