

Yellowtail Snapper Discussion Paper



Prepared for the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel
Spring 2021

Background

The status of the Yellowtail Snapper stock was assessed through the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process in 2019 (SEDAR 64 2019), with data through 2017. Yellowtail Snapper is considered a single stock distributed in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. The South Atlantic and Gulf Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSC) met jointly in July 2020 to review the SEDAR 64 Yellowtail Snapper assessment and recommend fishing levels for this stock. The SSCs deemed the assessment best scientific information available and useful for management. The stock was found to be not overfished and not undergoing overfishing.

The SSCs identified issues with the assessment that made it difficult to recommend fishing levels for the stock, however. The SSCs requested the opportunity to discuss the implications of these issues, as well as other concerns, in more detail before making fishing level recommendations for the stock. Hence, a joint meeting was held in October 2020 and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) received the recommendations at the December 2020 meeting. The South Atlantic Council directed staff to initiate an amendment to adjust catch levels for Yellowtail Snapper in the South Atlantic and coordinate with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council as the amendment is developed in 2021.

Actions Formerly Considered for Yellowtail Snapper in Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 (as of March 2017)

ACTION - Modify the jurisdictional allocation of the acceptable biological catch (ABC)

Currently: 75% of ABC to the South Atlantic and 25% to the Gulf based on jurisdictional boundary between Councils
Allocation = 50% average landings 1993-2008 + 50% average landings 2006-2008

Options considered:

- Remove the jurisdictional allocation
- Modify the jurisdictional allocation using different years of landings

ACTION - Specify a single annual catch limit (ACL) in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.

Currently: Total ACLs are specified separately for the South Atlantic and Gulf

Options considered:

- ACL = total ACL in the South Atlantic + total ACL in the Gulf of Mexico
- ACL = total ACL in the South Atlantic + jurisdictional ABC in the Gulf of Mexico

ACTION - Allow adaptive management of ACL and revise or establish sector allocations

Currently: Commercial = 52.56% of the total ACL and recreational = 47.44% of the total ACL. South Atlantic sector allocation = 50% average landings 1986-2008 + 50% average landings 2006-2008.

There are no sector allocations of the total ACL for yellowtail snapper in the Gulf of Mexico

Options considered:

- Remove sector allocations in the South Atlantic
- Modify sector allocations based on different years of landings
- Set aside a portion of the ACL (1% to 10%) as a common pool allocation
- Conditionally transfer a certain percentage of the ACL from a sector that is not landing its ACL to the other sector that is landing at least 90% of its ACL, if the landings of the donating sector are below the minimum landings threshold.

ACTION- Revise the accountability measures (AMs)

Currently: AMs are specified separately for the South Atlantic and Gulf and the SA has separate AMs for the commercial and recreational sectors.

Options considered:

- Removing in-season closures until total ACLs are met
- Different post-season AMs – reducing the length of the season the year after an overage, paybacks, trip limits to correct for overages, bag limit reductions to correct for overages
- AMs tied to common pool allocation

ACTION - Establish a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper.

Currently: There is no commercial trip limit in the South Atlantic or the Gulf.

Options considered:

- Trip limits during spawning months (May 15 to July 31)
- Trip limit once a percentage of the commercial ACL is met
- Multi-day commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper.

Summary of Public Hearing Comments on Snapper Grouper Amendment 44

Public hearings on the amendment were held in Winter 2018 in person and via listening stations. The latter were at multiple locations in Florida and the Florida Keys. Close to 250 people attended the hearings and approximately 120 comments were submitted. Below is a summary of the comments received:

- Concern over combining ABCs for the Gulf and the South Atlantic setting a precedent.
- Opposition to transfer of allocation between sectors. Not the best method to reduce closures. If considered, they should be temporary.
- Concern over the variability of recreational landings estimates. Slow Dolphin season can lead to increases in Yellowtail Snapper recreational landings.
- General opposition to reallocating or transferring recreational ACL to the commercial sector.
- Consider trip limits during spawning season and an increase in the minimum size limit (14-16 inches TL)
- Close or reduce harvest during spawning season (May-June)
- Consider a commercial trip limit with a step-down
- Keep commercial and recreational ACLs separate

- Do not change management until the next stock assessment
- August-July fishing year is working well for the fishery

In March 2017, the South Atlantic Council decided to postpone development of Amendment 44 pending expected revisions to recreational landings estimates because of changes to the MRIP methodology and to potentially account for the results of the stock assessment.

Action Formerly Considered for Yellowtail Snapper in Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 32 (December 2018)

- In-season closures occurred for the commercial sector on June 3, 2017, and on June 5, 2018 due to the sector meeting its ACL while the recreational sector had not harvested all of its ACL.
- The Council wanted to minimize the probability of in-season closures to prevent negative socio-economic impacts.
- Options considered:
 - An in-season closure will not occur for either sector until the total ACL is met or is projected to be met.
 - An in-season closure will occur for the commercial sector if the commercial ACL has been met and the total catch reaches, or is projected to reach, 80% of the total ACL.
 - An in-season closure will occur for the commercial sector if the commercial ACL has been met and the total catch reaches, or is projected to reach, 70% of the total ACL.

Snapper Grouper AP Input (Fall 2018):

- The August-July fishing year was working well for the commercial sector.
- The price of yellowtail snapper typically diminishes substantially during summer months so an in-season closure during that time is not as impactful as during other times of the year when marketability is better.
- AP stated their preference to wait until after the stock assessment was completed to make any management changes.
- AP supported taking no action to allow changes in management to take hold and allow fishermen to adjust.
- AP members indicated that fishing businesses that were affected by the 2017 hurricanes had stabilized.
- AP members mentioned intentional discarding of small yellowtail snapper in the summer months by some fishermen and suggested that an in-season closure could benefit the stock by reducing the length of time that this practice takes place.

In December 2018 the South Atlantic Council opted to not approve Regulatory Amendment 32 for submission.

Current Regulations for Yellowtail Snapper in the South Atlantic

- Total ACL = 3,037,500 lbs ww
- Commercial ACL (52.56%) = 1,596,510 lbs ww
- Recreational ACL (47.44%) = 1,440,990 lbs ww
- Commercial accountability measures (AMs): In-season closure if ACL is reached and payback (reduction in ACL) if overfished and total ACL has been exceeded.
- Recreational AMs: In-season closure if ACL is reached and payback if ACL is exceeded two years in a row. Payback and reduction of the season are triggered if the total ACL is also exceeded during the same fishing year and the species is overfished.
- Fishing Year: Aug 1- July 31
- Minimum size: 12" TL (both sectors)
- Bag Limit: 10/person/day in Snappers Aggregate

Recommended Catch Levels (SA and Gulf combined)

Year	ABC (millions of pounds)
2021	4.655
2022	4.242
2023	3.991
2024	3.836
2025	3.736

Next Steps:

1. Time series of landings including the newly revised recreational estimates (based on MRIP's Fishing Effort Survey, or FES) must be obtained.
2. The South Atlantic and Gulf Councils must agree on how they will split the ABC – use the same formula or try a new one?
3. Once the ABC is split, the South Atlantic Council must select a total ACL and sector allocations (use the same formula or try a new formula/approach?) to specify sector ACLs
4. If warranted, consider changes to management measures (e.g., trip/bag limits) and/or accountability measures.

Questions for the AP

- Please provide your observations of the Yellowtail Snapper Fishery:
 - Is the fishery being managed properly in federal waters?
 - Do you have any concerns regarding the fishery?
 - Are there issues regarding permits (e.g., dual permitted vessels in the Keys)?
 - Is the practice of discarding small fish during the summer months still prevalent?

- Please provide any recommendations on changes to management measures that would improve the performance of the Yellowtail Snapper Fishery.