

Discard Reduction for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

Advisory Panel Discussion Document

October 2021

Background

Discards have impacted recent stock assessments and management for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. In some cases (e.g. red snapper), removals due to discarding have comprised a significant percentage of total (discarded plus landed) removals. Large numbers of discards affect managers' ability to prevent overfishing, as well as the number of fish that can be landed by the fishery. Overfishing occurs if the number of removals exceeds the overfishing limit. If more of these removals occur as fish that die after release, fewer fish may be landed.

In April 2021, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) recommended several changes to management measures that could impact the number of discards and the survival of released fish in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. These changes included gear modifications and seasons for specific areas or bottom types. The Council reviewed the AP's recommendations, as well as other information on discards within the fishery (discard estimates and mortality rates from recent snapper grouper assessments), and directed staff to begin working on a framework amendment that would incorporate the AP's recommendations for reducing discard removals in the fishery as well as consider a slot limit to reduce discards of red snapper, specifically.

As the first step in development of this framework amendment, the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel is asked to respond to clarifying questions about the proposed actions that would assist the Council in developing alternatives for consideration. Responses to these questions will be supplemented with preliminary analyses and information from stock assessments, past Council visioning efforts, previous similar amendments, and Fishery Performance Reports, to provide the Council a summary of current information prior to option development.

Proposed Actions and Questions for the AP

1. Gear modifications

- AP recommendations:
 - Single hook rigs
 - Larger hooks
 - Leader modifications
 - Natural bait prohibition

Questions for the Advisory Panel

1. What minimum hook sizes should be considered? How is hook size measured and specified?
2. What maximum leader lengths should be considered? Are there other leader modifications that should be considered?
3. How should “natural” or “bait” be defined?
4. Discuss how each of these measures would be expected to reduce discard removals.
5. Are there additional gear-related changes to management that could reduce discard removals and should be considered in this amendment (e.g. no gaffing)?
 - a. Would requirement of descending device use for certain depths be useful and practical?
6. Which recommended gear modifications should be considered for the recreational fishery? For the commercial fishery?
7. Are there items more suited to best practices outreach campaigns than regulations?

2. Spatial/timed seasonal openings

Questions for the Advisory Panel

1. When snapper grouper discards or releases occur in the commercial fishery, what are the most common target species and what type of gear/technique is being used? How does this vary by state/region?
2. Would the commercial fishery prefer a shorter closed season that occurs in the summer or a longer closed season that occurs during the winter?
3. When snapper grouper discards or releases occur in the recreational fishery, what are the most common target species and what type of gear/technique is being used? How does this vary by state/region?
4. Would the recreational fishery prefer a shorter closed season that occurs in the summer or a longer closed season that occurs during the winter?
5. Would there be interest in consideration of a commercial aggregate trip limit and/or a recreational aggregate bag limit for snapper grouper species, with required retention (no discarding of snapper grouper species allowed) until the limit is met?
6. Would there be interest in establishing a season that includes all snapper grouper species? If so, should that be considered as separate recreational and commercial seasons or one season including both sectors?
7. Do you find there are specific areas (including depth or bottom type) where discards are more likely to occur? If so, what are those? Are there specific months when discards are more likely?
8. Are there areas that should be considered as marine protected areas? If so, discuss the pros and cons of establishing such areas.

3. Red snapper slot limit or maximum size limit

- Red snapper are the most commonly discarded snapper grouper species, and removals due to discards outnumber removals due to landings.
- Currently, there is no minimum size limit for red snapper in the South Atlantic during the open seasons.
- Minimum size limits can improve survival of smaller fish to mature sizes/ages. Maximum size limits can discourage highgrading improve survival of large females that exceed the maximum size limit, and improve or maintain stock productivity through greater abundance of large, spawning females.
- An application providing an overview of the red snapper fishery, including management history, landings, and assessment information, has been developed and can be found here: https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/SA_FisheryDataRedSnapper/

Questions for the Advisory Panel

1. What are the potential benefits and disadvantages of a slot limit for red snapper?
2. What minimum and maximum size limits should be considered?
3. Should differing slot limits be considered in different areas of the region?