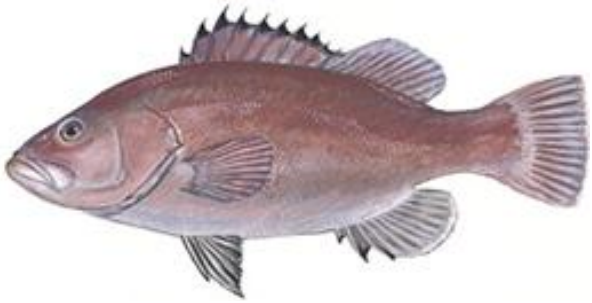
Decision Document

Regulatory Amendment 20 (Snowy Grouper) to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Rebuilding strategy, annual catch limits, and management measures for snowy grouper



June 1, 2014

Background

In 2004, the snowy grouper stock was first assessed through SEDAR as a benchmark assessment (SEDAR 2004). That assessment (SEDAR-4) applied a statistical catch-age model to data through 2002. Recreational landings from the Florida Keys were not included because there was no way to post-stratify them into Atlantic and Gulf Council areas. The results indicated that fishing mortality first exceeded F_{MSY} in the mid-1970s, and overfishing continued through the end of the assessment period. During that time, the population declined to levels below SSB_{MSY} starting in the early 1980s. SEDAR-4 concluded that the stock was overfished and experiencing overfishing in 2002. $SSB_{2002}/SSB_{MSY} = 0.18$ and $F_{current}/F_{MSY} = 3.08$.

In 2013, the snowy grouper stock was assessed through SEDAR as a standard assessment (SEDAR 2013). That assessment (SEDAR 36) applied a statistical catch-age model to data through 2012. Recreational landings from the Florida Keys were included using a post-stratification methodology to separate Florida West Coast landings into those from the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico areas. The results were reviewed by the South Atlantic Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in April 2014, and their report was presented to the South Atlantic Council in June 2014. The SSC determined that the snowy grouper stock is not undergoing overfished, is rebuilding, and remains overfished. The SSC recommended an acceptable biological catch equal to the yield at $75\%F_{MSY}$, and an overfishing limit equal to the yield at F_{MSY}. The following is taken directly from the SEDAR 36 assessment report (page 8):

"Results suggest that spawning stock declined until the mid-1990s and then increased gradually over the last decade. The terminal (2012) base-run estimate of spawning stock was below SSBMSY (SSB2012/SSBMSY = 0.49), as was the median estimate (SSB2012/SSBMSY = 0.38), indicating that the **stock remains overfished**. The estimated fishing rate has exceeded the MFMT (represented by FMSY) for most of the assessment period, but only once in the last six years. This one overage occurred in 2012, when the recreational fleet exceeded its quota. Still, the terminal estimate, which is based on a three-year geometric mean, is below FMSY in the case of the base run (F2010–2012/FMSY = 0.59) and the median (F2010–2012/FMSY = 0.70). Thus, this assessment indicates that the stock has not yet recovered to its biomass target, but is **no longer experiencing overfishing**."

The 2009 National Standard 1 Guidelines provide a definition of overfishing that allows overfishing to be determined in two ways, by a fishing mortality rate or by a level of catch:

§ 600.310 (e)(2)(i)(B)

"Overfishing (to overfish) occurs whenever a stock or stock complex is subjected to a level of fishing mortality or annual total catch that jeopardizes the capacity of a stock or stock complex to produce maximum sustainable yield (MSY) on a continuing basis."

The National Standard 1 Guidelines provide more detail about these two methods, and require that FMPs describe which method will be used to determine an overfishing status:

§ 600.310 (e)(2)(ii)(A)

Status Determination Criteria to determine overfishing status. Each fishery management plan (FMP) must describe which of the following two methods will be used for each stock or stock complex to determine an overfishing status.

(1) Fishing mortality rate exceeds maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT). Exceeding the MFMT for a period of 1 year or more constitutes overfishing. The MFMT or reasonable proxy may be expressed either as a single number (a fishing mortality rate or F value), or as a function of spawning biomass or other measure of reproductive potential.
(2) Catch exceeds the overfishing limit (OFL). Should the annual catch exceed the annual OFL for 1 year or more, the stock or stock complex is considered subject to overfishing.

The OFL is defined as an annual level of catch that corresponds directly to the MFMT, and is the best estimate of the catch level above which overfishing is occurring. Biomass is below SSB_{MSY}. The stock is considered to be overfished according to the current overfished definition ($1-M*SSB_{MSY}$).

Each of the two methods for determining overfishing has benefits and drawbacks with MFMT being a better estimate of overfishing status in a year in which a stock is assessed and OFL a better estimate of overfishing status in years when a current estimate of fishing mortality is not available. Therefore, the Council proposes the use of both the MFMT and OFL as metrics to determine the overfishing status of snowy grouper.

For snowy grouper, overfishing will be determined on an annual basis by the MFMT and OFL methods. The estimate of F_{MSY} (MFMT) for snowy grouper from SEDAR 36 is 0.14, while the corresponding OFL values increase as the stock rebuilds. If either the MFMT (during an assessment year) or the OFL method (during a non-assessment year) is exceeded, the stock will be considered to be undergoing overfishing.

Table 3.1. Stock status of snowy grouper.

	SEDAR 36 (2012 most recent data)
Overfishing ($F_{2010-2012}/F_{MSY}$)	No (0.59)
Overfished ($SSBF_{2012}$/MSST(75%))	Yes (0.65)
F_{MSY} (proxy for MFMT)	0.14
MSY	418,600 pounds whole weight (lb ww)
MSST	1,442,264 lb ww
OFL*	222,000 lb ww in 2015 235,000 lb ww in 2016 248,000 lb ww in 2017 259,000 lb ww in 2018 272,000 lb ww in 2019
ABC	164,136 lb ww in 2015 178,791 lb ww in 2016 192,469 lb ww in 2017 205,170 lb ww in 2018 218,848 lb ww in 2019

Purpose & Need

Purpose for Action

The *purpose* of this amendment~~for the of this proposed action~~ is to adjust the rebuilding strategy, acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch limit (ACL), maximum sustainable yield (MSY), minimum stock size threshold (MSST), optimum yield (OY), and revise management measures for the snowy grouper component of the snapper grouper fishery. These adjustments address the recent stock assessment results based on data through 2012.

Need for Action

The *need* for the amendment is to~~proposed action is to~~ prevent overfishing and continue rebuilding the stock while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

The IPT is recommending the changes shown above.

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should provide guidance on the Purpose and Need.

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR THE PURPOSE AND NEED.

OPTION 2. MODIFY THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR THE PURPOSE AND NEED (COMMITTEE/COUNCIL TO SPECIFY CHANGES) AND APPROVE.

OPTION 3. OTHERS???

2.1 Action 1. Adjust the Rebuilding Strategy for Snowy Grouper

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current rebuilding strategy is specified as maintaining a modified/constant fishing mortality rate ($F=F_{MSY}$) throughout the rebuilding timeframe. The total allowable catch (TAC) specified for 2009, of 102,960 pounds whole weight (lb ww) remains in effect beyond 2009 until modified. The current acceptable biological catch (ABC) is 102,960 ~~pounds~~ lb ww consistent with this rebuilding strategy.

Alternative 2. Define a rebuilding strategy for snowy grouper that maintains a constant fishing mortality rate ($F=F_{Rebuild}$) throughout the rebuilding timeframe. Year 1 remains 2006 and the yield at $F_{Rebuild}$ and ABC projections will change with each assessment. **Specify a probability of success of 50% or what the SSC recommends based on the ABC control rule (Council to specify).** ABC would change each year until 2019~~xx~~; the ABC for 2019~~ xx~~ would remain in effect until modified.

Preferred Alternative 3. Define a rebuilding strategy for snowy grouper that maintains a constant fishing mortality rate ($F= 75\%F_{MSY}$) throughout the rebuilding timeframe. Year 1 remains 2006 and the yield at $75\%F_{MSY}$ and ABC projections will change with each assessment. ABC would change each year until 2019; the ABC for 2019 would remain in effect until modified.

Alternative 4. Define a rebuilding strategy for snowy grouper that maintains a constant fishing mortality rate ($F=F_{current}$) throughout the rebuilding timeframe. Year 1 remains 2006 and the yield at $F_{current}$ and ABC projections will change with each assessment. ABC would change each year until 2019~~ xx~~; the ABC for 2019~~ xx~~ would remain in effect until modified.

The IPT recommends the changes shown above for Action 1.

The Snapper Grouper AP chose Preferred Alternative 3, as modified, as their preferred alternative.

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should provide guidance on Action 1.

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING CHANGES FOR ALTERNATIVES 1-4 UNDER ACTION 1.

OPTION 2. MODIFY THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING CHANGES FOR ALTERNATIVES 1-4 UNDER ACTION 1(COMMITTEE/COUNCIL TO SPECIFY CHANGES) AND APPROVE.

OPTION 3. MODIFY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE?

OPTION 4. OTHERS???

Table 4.1.2. Total ABC values (lb ww) under **Preferred Alternative 3** based on yield at F=75%F_{MSY}. The current total ABC = 102,960 lb ww; the Commercial ACL (95%) = 97,812 lb ww; and the Recreational ACL = 5,148 lb ww or 523 fish.

Year	Yield at 75% F_{MSY} (lb ww)	Difference from current ABC (lb ww)	Percent Difference (%)	Probability Rebuilding (%)
2013	102,585	-375	-0.36%	12.0%
2014	102,585	-375	-0.36%	14.8%
2015	**164,136**	**+61,176**	**+59.42%**	17.3%
2016	**178,791**	**+75,831**	**+73.65%**	18.5%
2017	**192,469**	**+89,509**	**+86.94%**	20.3%
2018	**205,170**	**+102,210**	**+99.27%**	22.4%
2019	**218,848**	**+115,888**	**+112.56%**	24.7%
2020	231,549			27.2%
2021	243,273			29.7%
2022	254,997			32.3%
2023	264,767			34.9%
2024	274,537			37.4%
2025	283,330			39.8%
2026	291,146			42.4%
2027	299,939			44.8%
2028	306,778			47.2%
2029	312,640			49.5%
2030	318,502			51.8%
2031	324,364			54.1%
2032	330,226			56.3%
2033	336,088			58.4%
2034	340,973			60.2%
2035	345,858			62.0%
2036	350,743			63.6%
2037	354,651			65.5%
2038	358,559			67.2%
2039	362,467			68.9%

2.1.1 Comparison of Alternatives

The rebuilding strategy under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** was specified in Amendment 15A to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2008) prior to the P* approach and establishment of the acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rule. Based on the results of SEDAR 4 (2004), which indicated snowy grouper was overfished and undergoing overfishing, Amendment 15A specified a 34 year rebuilding schedule and a rebuilding strategy for snowy grouper that maintains a modified/constant fishing mortality rate ($F=F_{MSY}$) throughout the rebuilding timeframe. **Alternatives 2-4** would establish a rebuilding strategy based on the results of the most recent

stock assessment, which indicates the stock remains overfished, is rebuilding, and is no longer experiencing overfishing. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would constrain harvest to a lower level than **Alternatives 2-4** and be expected to be more beneficial to the snowy grouper stock. However, the 2013 stock assessment update indicates snowy grouper is no longer undergoing overfishing, and the SSC has increased the ABC; therefore, there is not a biological need to constrain harvest at the level specified by **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. **Alternative 2** with a 50% probability of successfully rebuilding snowy grouper by 2019, would set the rebuilding strategy to the yield at $F_{Rebuild}$, which would allow for a higher ABC than the yield at $75\%F_{MSY}$ recommended by the South Atlantic Council's SSC. **Alternative 2** with a 70% probability of successfully rebuilding snowy grouper by 2019, would allow for a lower ABC than the yield at $75\%F_{MSY}$ recommended by the South Atlantic Council's SSC. **Preferred Alternative 3** is based on the yield at $75\%F_{MSY}$ recommended by the SSC and would be expected to have greater biological effects than **Alternative 2**. Therefore, **Preferred Alternative 3** would be using best available science to adjust the rebuilding strategy for snowy grouper. **Alternative 4**, which would allow for a more conservative level of harvest than recommended by the South Atlantic Council's SSC would be expected to have intermediate biological effects compared with **Alternative 2** with a 50% probability of rebuilding success and **Preferred Alternative 3**, but less than **Alternative 2** with a 70% probability of rebuilding success and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, the snowy grouper rebuilding strategy would not be updated based on the results of the most recent stock assessment. This creates short-term and long-term indirect adverse effects for commercial and recreational fishermen when a stock assessment indicates higher catch levels are possible. While the long-term health of the stock may improve with a rebuilding strategy that allows for a lower than necessary ABC, fishermen would not benefit with increased health of a stock unless the ABC also increases, potentially resulting in a higher ACL. A stock assessment that indicates a lower ABC is necessary, would have indirect short-term benefits through potentially higher harvests. But this also would result in long-term adverse effects for fishermen as they could potentially exceed the ACL (if landings data collection efforts are not successful in accurately predicting an appropriate closure date) and result in damage to the long-term health of the stock and lower future catch rates. The ranking of the different alternatives below is based on the expectation of long-term economic benefits resulting from better stock health and future catch rates. Long-term indirect economic benefits from healthier stocks trump most short-term harvest rate increases. **Alternative 2** with a 50% probability of rebuilding success is expected to yield the highest long-term economic benefits compared to the next best **Preferred Alternative 3**, then **Alternative 4,** the **Alternative 2** with a 70% probability of rebuilding success, and then **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Because the recent assessment update determined that snowy grouper are no longer undergoing overfishing, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would be expected to result in minimal or no benefits to fishermen by not taking advantage of possible flexibility in the rebuilding plan and associated ABCs. Overall, the most benefits to fishermen and communities would come from a rebuilding strategy that allows increased harvest and access to the resource for fishermen than the current ABC and ACL, but would not cause long-term negative biological effects to the stock that could result in negative effects on fishermen in the future. **Alternatives 2-4** would result in higher ABCs than under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and increase access to the resource, which

would be expected to reduce and minimize short-term negative effects on fishermen. **Alternative 2** with a 50% chance of rebuilding success would be expected to have the least short-term negative effects on fishermen, followed by **Preferred Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4**.

Alternatives that specify the lowest ABC would have the largest administrative effects due to the potential for ACLs to be met and accountability measures (AMs) to be triggered. Administrative effects would be expected to be ranked lower to higher in the following order: 50% probability of success under **Alternative 2, Preferred Alternative 3, Alternative 4**, 70% probability of success under **Alternative 2,** and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. All the rebuilding strategy alternatives considered would require continued monitoring of commercial and recreational landings in addition to continued enforcement of current harvest restrictions for snowy grouper including the 1-fish per vessel bag limit, and the 100 pound gutted weight (lb gw) trip limit. Overall, administrative impacts under all the rebuilding strategy alternatives are not likely to be significant.

2.2 Action 2. Adjust Annual Catch Limits for Snowy Grouper

Alternative 1. (No Action.) The current acceptable biological catch (ABC) = 102,960 pounds whole weight (lb ww) or 87,254 pounds gutted weight (lb gw). The total annual catch limit (ACL) (=ABC), commercial ACL, and recreational ACL are shown below:

whole weight		Calculated Values		Implemented Values (SG Am 15B)		
ABC	ACL	Com ACL (95%)	Rec ACL (5%)	Com ACL (95%)	Rec ACL (5%)	
102,960	102,960	97,812	5,148			
gutted weight						
ABC	ACL	Com ACL (95%)	Rec ACL (5%)	Com ACL (95%)	Rec ACL (5%)	Rec # Fish
87,254	87,254	82,891	4,363	82,900	4,400	523

Discussion

ACL is equal to ABC right now but Amendment 17B did not specifically set ACL=ABC. It set the commercial ACL equal to the commercial quota from Amendment 15B and the recreational ACL equal to the recreational allocation from Amendment 15B. It indicated the TAC was equal to the yield at Foy. By default it set ACL = ABC but there is no alternative that states ACL = ABC in Amendment 17B, and ACL was an unknown entity in Amendment 15B.

The IPT recommends the changes shown above for Action 2.

Alternative 2. Specify that ACL=ABC=OY.

The ACL, commercial ACL, and recreational ACL are shown below.

Whole Weight					
Year	ABC	ACL	Com ACL (95%)	Rec ACL (5%)	Estimated Rec #Fish
2015	164,136	164,136	155,929	8,207	1,221
2016	178,791	178,791	169,851	8,940	1,319
2017	192,469	192,469	182,846	9,623	1,417
2018	205,170	205,170	194,912	10,259	1,466
2019	218,848	218,848	207,906	10,942	1,563
Gutted Weight					
Year	ABC	ACL	Com ACL (95%)	Rec ACL (5%)	Estimated Rec #Fish
2015	139,098	139,098	132,143	6,955	1,221
2016	151,518	151,518	143,942	7,576	1,319
2017	163,109	163,109	154,954	8,155	1,417
2018	173,873	173,873	165,179	8,694	1,466
2019	185,464	185,464	176,191	9,273	1,563

The Snapper Grouper AP chose Alternative 2 as their preferred alternative.

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should provide guidance on Action 2.

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR ALTERNATIVE 1 UNDER ACTION 2.

OPTION 2. MODIFY THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR ALTERNATIVE 1 UNDER ACTION 2 (COMMITTEE/COUNCIL TO SPECIFY CHANGES) AND APPROVE.

OPTION 3. APPROVE ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 2 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

OPTION 4. OTHERS???

Discussion

The ABC generated from SEDAR 36 is in pounds, however, the recreational ACL is in numbers of fish. Therefore, the recreational ACL in pounds had to be converted to numbers of fish. This was done by first determining snowy grouper average weight by year. As the stock rebuilds the average weight is expected to change each year. SEDAR 36 provides the annual projected removals both by numbers and weight when fishing mortality is fixed at 75%F_{MSY} (Table 22 of SEDAR 36 final report). This fishing mortality rate was chosen because 75%F_{MSY} is the optimum yield management benchmark for the stock, and the yield generated from 75%F_{MSY} was used to determine the new proposed ABC numbers. For each year the projection weights are divided by the projection numbers to determine the annual average weight.

Table 2.1 shows the results of this calculation. The annual average weights are divided into the recreational ACL in pounds whole weight to convert the ACL from pounds to numbers of fish. For example, the 2015 recreational ACL of 8,207 pounds whole weight is divided by the average weight of 6.72 to get a recreational ACL of 1,221 fish.

Table 2.1. Annual average weight of South Atlantic snowy grouper generated from SEDAR 36 projection results when fishing mortality is fixed at 75%F_{MSY}. Numbers and weight projections came from the median values of the stochastic projections, and the numbers are provided in Table 22 of the SEDAR 36 final report.

Year	Numbers	Weight (ww lbs)	Average Weight
2015	25,000	168,000	6.72
2016	27,000	183,000	6.78
2017	29,000	197,000	6.79
2018	30,000	210,000	7.00
2019	32,000	224,000	7.00

Alternative 3. Update the ABC from the recent SEDAR assessment. Set ACL=X%ABC=OY. The ABC, ACL, commercial ACL, and recreational ACL are shown below.

Sub-alternative 3a. Set ACL=95%ABC=OY

Sub-alternative 3b. Set ACL=90%ABC=OY

Sub-alternative 3c. Set ACL=85%ABC=OY

Year	ABC ww	ACL ww	ACL gw	Com ACL gw (95%)	Rec ACL gw (5%)	Estimated Rec #Fish
Sub-Alt 3a, ACL = 95%ABC						
2015	164,136	155,929	132,143	125,536	6,607	1,160
2016	178,791	169,851	143,942	136,745	7,197	1,253
2017	192,469	182,846	154,954	147,206	7,748	1,346
2018	205,170	194,912	165,179	156,920	8,259	1,392
2019	218,848	207,906	176,191	167,382	8,810	1,485
Sub-Alt 3b, ACL = 90%ABC						
2015	164,136	147,722	125,188	118,929	6,259	1,099
2016	178,791	160,912	136,366	129,548	6,818	1,187
2017	192,469	173,222	146,798	139,458	7,340	1,275
2018	205,170	184,653	156,486	148,661	7,824	1,319
2019	218,848	196,963	166,918	158,572	8,346	1,407
Sub-Alt 3b, ACL = 85%ABC						
2015	164,136	139,516	118,234	112,322	5,912	1,038
2016	178,791	151,972	128,790	122,351	6,440	1,121
2017	192,469	163,599	138,643	131,711	6,932	1,204
2018	205,170	174,395	147,792	140,402	7,390	1,246
2019	218,848	186,021	157,645	149,763	7,882	1,329

2.2.1 Comparison of Alternatives

While the ACL under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is lower than those proposed under **Alternatives 2** and **3** (including its sub-alternatives), it does not reflect the recommendations of the latest stock assessment for snowy grouper, and specifying an ACL at a lower level may not be needed to maintain harvest of snowy grouper at sustainable levels. **Alternative 3**, which would specify a buffer between the ABC and ACL would be expected to have higher biological benefits when compared with **Alternative 2**, which would set ACL equal to the ABC and OY. **Sub-alternative 3c** has the largest buffer between the ABC and the ACL and would be expected to yield the largest biological benefits of all the sub-alternatives under **Alternative 3**. Furthermore, scientific and management uncertainties are included in the SSC's ABC control rule, which is factored into the ABC (and therefore ACL) values generated under **Alternatives 2** and **3** (including its sub-alternatives).

In general, the higher the ACL, the greater the short-term economic benefits to commercial and recreational fishermen. Long-term economic benefits can also be realized if the ACL options are expected to achieve long-term biological health of the resource. However, the chances of long-term health are improved (assuming the sectors are held to their ACLs) if a buffer exists between the ABC and the ACL. Therefore, since **Alternative 3** incorporates information from the newest stock assessment and incorporates a buffer, it is expected to achieve the greatest long-term health of the stock and therefore the greatest long-term economic benefits with **Sub-alterative 3c** offering the largest buffer and therefore the largest economics benefits. **Alternative 2** incorporates new information from the new stock assessment and has a higher ACL, and is therefore expected to produce greater long-term economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)** but because of a lack of a buffer between the ABC and ACL, **Alternative 3, Sub-alternative 3c** would likely yield the greatest economic benefits.

In general, the higher the ACL, the greater the short-term social benefits that would be expected to accrue, assuming long-term recovery and rebuilding goals are met. Adhering to stock recovery and rebuilding goals is assumed to result in net long-term positive social and economic benefits. Additionally, adjustments in an ACL based on updated information from a stock assessment would be the most beneficial in the long term to fishermen and communities because catch limits would be based on the current conditions. Because the resulting ACL would be the same, the expected effects on fishermen under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 2** would be identical, and would likely be minimal. The lower ACLs in **Sub-alternatives 3a-3c** under **Alternative 3** could have negative short-term effects on fishermen if the AMs were triggered when a lower ACL is met. **Sub-alternative 3c** would be expected to result in the least benefits to fishermen and communities. However, setting the ACL at a percentage of the ABC under **Sub-alternatives 3a-3c** would still result in a higher ACL than under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, and allow more access to the resource for fishermen than under the status quo ACL.

Administrative impacts of this action are likely to be minimal. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** may result in slightly higher indirect administrative impacts because the lower ACLs are more likely to cause AMs to be triggered in-season, which would require development of outreach materials and internal agency documents to close the commercial sector and assess whether or not the recreational ACL has been exceeded. **Alternatives 2** and **3** (including its sub-

alternatives) would not result in significant administrative cost or time burdens other than notifying fishery participants of the change in the sector ACLs and continued monitoring of the sector ACLs.

Table 4.2.1a. ABC and ACL values (ww and gw) of snowy grouper from 2015 to 2019 under **Alternative 2**. Current commercial ACL is 97,812 lb ww or 82,891 lb gw; and the recreational ACL is 5,148 lb ww or 4,363 lb gw. Commercial ACL is 95% of the total ACL and recreational ACL is 5% of the total ACL.

Whole Weight									
Year	**ABC**	**Total ACL**	**Commercial ACL**	**Difference**	**Percent Difference**	**Recreational ACL**	**Difference**	**Percent Difference**	**Estimated Recreational Numbers of Fish**
2015	164,136	164,136	155,929	+58,117	+59%	8,207	+3,059	+59%	1,221
2016	178,791	178,791	169,851	+72,039	+74%	8,940	+3,792	+74%	1,319
2017	192,469	192,469	182,846	+85,034	+87%	9,623	+4,475	+87%	1,417
2018	205,170	205,170	194,912	+97,100	+99%	10,259	+5,111	+99%	1,466
2019	218,848	218,848	207,906	+110,094	+113%	10,942	+5,794	+113%	1,563
Gutted Weight									
2015	139,098	139,098	132,143	+49,252	+59%	6,955	+2,592	+59%	1,221
2016	151,518	151,518	143,942	+61,051	+74%	7,576	+3,213	+74%	1,319
2017	163,109	163,109	154,954	+72,063	+87%	8,155	+3,792	+87%	1,417
2018	173,873	173,873	165,179	+82,288	+99%	8,694	+4,331	+99%	1,466
2019	185,464	185,464	176,191	+93,300	+113%	9,273	+4,910	+113%	1,563

2.3 Action 3. Split the Commercial Fishing Year into 2 Fishing Seasons for Snowy Grouper

(Note: The Accountability Measures (AMs) are being addressed in the Generic Accountability Measure/Dolphin Allocation Amendment.)

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current commercial snowy grouper fishing year~~season~~ is the calendar year with no split of the commercial ACL into separate seasons.

Alternative 2. Split the commercial snowy grouper fishing season with an equal split of the ACL between January through April and May through December with the following trip limits for each of the seasons.

Revised Alternative 2. Split the commercial snowy grouper ACL into two quotas: 50% to the period January 1 through April 30 and 50% to the period May 1 through December 31. Any remaining commercial quota from the January through April season carries over into the May through December season; any remaining commercial quota from the May through December season does not carry over into the next fishing year. The following trip limit would apply to each season:

Sub-alternative 2a. 100 pounds ~~whole~~ gutted weight (lb gw).

Sub-alternative 2b. 150 lb gw.~~pounds whole gutted weight (lb gw)~~.

Sub-alternative 2c. 200 lb gw.~~pounds whole gutted weight (lb gw)~~.

Year	whole weight			Com Quota	Com Quota
	ABC	ACL	Com ACL (95%)	Jan-April	May-Dec
2015	164,136	164,136	155,929	77,965	77,965
2016	178,791	178,791	169,851	84,926	84,926
2017	192,469	192,469	182,846	91,423	91,423
2018	205,170	205,170	194,912	97,456	97,456
2019	218,848	218,848	207,906	103,953	103,953

The Snapper Grouper AP chose Alternative 2, Sub-alternative 2c as modified, as their preferred alternative.

New Alternative 3. Split the commercial snowy grouper ACL into two quotas: 40% to the period January 1 through April 30 and 60% to the period May 1 through December 31. Any remaining commercial quota from the January through April season carries over into the May through December season; any remaining commercial quota from the May through December season does not carry over into the next fishing year. Maintain the current 100 pound gutted weight (lb gw) trip limit for the January 1 through April 30 season and establish the following trip limit for the May through December season:

Sub-alternative 3a. 100 lb gw.
Sub-alternative 3b. 150 lb gw.
Sub-alternative 3c. 200 lb gw.
Sub-alternative 3d. 250 lb gw.
Sub-alternative 3e. 300 lb gw.

IPT recommends the changes to Alternatives 1 & 2 and insertion of the table for Alternative 2.

Note: The analyses have been conducted for the increase in ACL for 2015. If the ACL increases each year, then the benefits would increase each year. New Alternative 3 was added as requested by the Snapper Grouper Committee Chair; preliminary analyses have been added and, if included, the economic, social, and administrative impacts will be added.

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should provide guidance on Action 3.

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR ACTION 3 AND ALTERNATIVES 1 & 2 UNDER ACTION 3.

OPTION 2. MODIFY THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR ACTION 3 AND ALTERNATIVES 1 & 2 UNDER ACTION 3 (COMMITTEE/COUNCIL TO SPECIFY CHANGES) AND APPROVE.

OPTION 3. APPROVE ADDING ALTERNATIVE 3 UNDER ACTION 3

OPTION 4. APPROVE ALTERNATIVE X UNDER ACTION 3 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

OPTION 5. OTHERS???

2.3.1 Comparison of Alternatives

By dividing the commercial ACL into two six-month fishing quotas (**Alternative 2**), fishermen would theoretically be given the opportunity to fish for snowy grouper at the beginning of the year and during the summer. The divided commercial quota is intended to provide fishermen in the northern and southern areas of the South Atlantic a chance to fish for snowy grouper when weather conditions are favorable in their respective areas. However, since the ACL is likely to be increased under **Action 2**, a closure during season 1 is not expected for most of the ACLs being considered. Without an in-season closure during season 1 for most of the scenarios examine, a split season has little to no effect on extending the fishing season. The

biological effects of **Alternatives 1 (No Action)** and the trip limit sub-alternatives under **Alternative 2** would be expected to be neutral because ACLs and AMs are in place to cap harvest, and take action if ACLs are exceeded. Alternatives with larger trip limits (**Sub-alternative 2c**) could present a greater biological risk to snowy grouper in terms of exceeding the ACL since the rate of harvest would be greater. Larger trip limits could also result in earlier closures of snowy grouper, which can lead to an increased level of regulatory discards. Similarly smaller trip limits could increase bycatch if a trip is not ended and fishermen continue to target co-occurring species when the snowy grouper trip limit is met. Therefore, little difference in the biological effects of the trip limit alternatives is expected.

A split in the ACL (**Alternative 2**) could to provide long-term economic benefits because it would help spread harvest throughout a greater portion of the year and maintain market demand. However, as no closure is expected in season 1 for the most of the scenarios examined under **Action 3**, the effect of splitting the commercial into ACL into two seasonal quotas under **Action 2** would not be much different from leaving the fishing season intact (**Alternative 1 No Action**).

Snowy grouper is an important commercial species for deepwater catch combinations and at specific times of the year when other species are closed. The effects on the commercial fleet due to changing the snowy grouper commercial fishing year into split seasons would depend on the ACL set in **Actions 1** and **2,** and the rate of catch, which would depend on the trip limit specified in **Action 4**.

Under current conditions and fishing patterns, no closure is expected in Season 1 for most of the scenarios examined under **Action 3** (**Table 4.3.2**). If participation, market conditions, and fishing behavior stay the same, the effect of splitting the commercial into ACL into two seasonal quotas under **Alternative 2** would not be much different from leaving the fishing season intact (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**). However, fishermen may shift effort to or from a certain species (including targets on multi-species trips) based on economic, regulatory, biological, or environmental changes in the fishery. Although split seasons for snowy grouper may not immediately produce any effects on the fleet and associated businesses and communities, there could be positive and negative effects on commercial fishermen in different areas of the South Atlantic if conditions change in the future, as discussed below.

For fishermen in the more northern range of the South Atlantic region, the early months of the fishing year may not be feasible times to travel to snowy grouper fishing grounds (see **Table 4.3.1** in **Section 4.3.1**), and these fishermen may only have access to a lower portion of the commercial ACL in later months. Maintaining the commercial ACL for the whole fishing year under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would limit benefits for these fishermen from increased trip limits and any increased in the ACL due to restricted access to snowy grouper due to environmental conditions.

A split season under **Alternative 2** could likely be beneficial to commercial fishermen harvesting snowy grouper in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Because the current fishing year starts in January 1 (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**), fishermen in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia could have less access to snowy grouper in the early months due to weather, or could risk unsafe conditions to fish, if an increased trip limit results in additional

participation in snowy grouper harvest. A split season under **Alternative 2** would likely increase access to the ACL for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Currently, there is no split season for the commercial sector for snowy grouper (**Alternative 1, No Action**). **Alternative 1** (**No Action)** would have fewer administrative impacts than **Alternative 2** because only one quota would need to be monitored. **Alternative 2** and its sub-alternatives would add to the administrative burden in the form of cost, time, or law enforcement efforts. However, even if the commercial ACLs are met during each of the fishing seasons under **Sub-Alternatives 2a**, **2b,** and **2c**, the administrative resources required to implement in-season closures would not be much different from what is currently in place under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. The administrative effects could be greater for alternatives with higher trip limits because there is a greater chance that the ACL would be met and action would be needed to close the commercial sector.

Table 4.3.2a. Predicted closure dates for the snowy grouper commercial fishery in the South Atlantic under the split seasons proposed in **Action 3**. Predicted closure dates for **Alternative 1 (No action)** are the same as those for Season 2 in **Sub-Alternative 2a** in **Action 3** and are also shown in **Table 4.4.2** in **Action 4**.

Action 2: Proposed Annual Catch Limits	**Action 3: Split the Commercial Fishing Season**					
	Sub-alternative 2a		**Sub-alternative 2b**		**Sub-alternative 2c**	
	100 lb gw		150 lb gw		200 lb gw	
	Season 1	Season 2	Season 1	Season 2	Season 1	Season 2
Alt. 1 (Current ACL) (ACL split to 41,450 lb gw)	No Closure	24-Aug	18-Apr	10-Jul	28-Mar	24-Jun
Alt. 2 (ACL = 100% ABC from SEDAR 36, 75% F_{MSY})) (ACL split to 66,072 lb gw)	No Closure	No Closure	No Closure	3-Nov	No Closure	18-Aug
Sub-alt. 3a (ACL = 95% ABC) (ACL split to 62,768 lb gw)	No Closure	No Closure	No Closure	10-Oct	No Closure	6-Aug
Sub-alt. 3b (ACL = 90% ABC) (ACL split to 59,465 lb gw)	No Closure	No Closure	No Closure	19-Sep	No Closure	25-Jul
Sub-alt. 3c (ACL 85% ABC) (ACL split to 56,161 lb gw)	No Closure	16-Dec	No Closure	1-Sep	28-Apr	16-Jul

Table 4.3.2b. Predicted closure dates for the snowy grouper commercial fishery in the South Atlantic under **new Alternative 3** in **Action 3**.

Season 1	100 lb gw	Season 2	**Sub-alt 3a**	**Sub-alt 3b**	**Sub-alt 3c**	**Sub-alt 3d**	**Sub-alt 3e**
			100 lbs gw	150 lbs gw	200 lbs gw	250 lbs gw	300 lbs gw
Alt. 1 ACL (split to 33,160 lb gw)	21-Apr	Alt. 1 ACL (split to 49,740 lb gw)	1-Sep	27-Jul	6-Jul	24-Jun	17-Jun
Alt. 2 ACL (split to 52,857 lb gw)	No Closure	Alt. 2 ACL (split to 79,286 lb gw)	No Closure	5-Dec	3-Oct	28-Aug	6-Aug
Alt. 3a ACL (split to 50,214 lb gw)	No Closure	Alt. 3a ACL (split to 75,321 lb gw)	No Closure	16-Nov	18-Sep	18-Aug	29-Jul
Alt. 3b ACL (split to 47,572 lb gw)	No Closure	Alt. 3b ACL (split to 71,357 lb gw)	No Closure	25-Oct	3-Sep	7-Aug	21-Jul
Alt. 3c ACL (split to 44,929 lb gw)	No Closure	Alt. 3c ACL (split to 67,393 lb gw)	16-Dec	30-Sep	21-Aug	28-Jul	13-Jul

2.4 Action 4. Modify the Commercial Trip Limit for Snowy Grouper

(Note: The Accountability Measures (AMs) are being addressed in the Generic Accountability Measure/Dolphin Allocation Amendment.)

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current commercial snowy grouper trip limit is 100 pounds ~~whole~~ gutted weight (lb ~~ww~~ gw).

Alternative 2. ~~Establish a~~Modify the commercial snowy grouper trip limit from January 1 until the ACL is met or projected to be met:

Sub-alternative 2a. 300 ~~pounds gutted weight (~~lb gw~~)~~.

Sub-alternative 2b. 200 ~~pounds gutted weight (~~lb gw~~)~~.

Sub-alternative 2c. 150 ~~pounds gutted weight (~~lb gw~~)~~.

Alternative 3. ~~Establish a~~Modify the commercial snowy grouper trip limit of 150 ~~pounds whole gutted weight (~~lb ~~w~~ gw~~)~~ from January through April and a different trip limit from May through the end of the year:

Sub-alternative 3a. 50 ~~pounds whole gutted (~~lb gw~~)~~.

Sub-alternative 3b. 100 ~~pounds whole gutted= (=~~lb~~w~~ gw).

Alternative 4. ~~Establish a~~Modify the commercial snowy grouper trip limit of 100 ~~pounds whole weight (~~lb gw~~ww)~~ January through April for all areas; for May through August from North Carolina through Cape Canaveral, Florida and south of Marathon, Florida as shown below; and 100 ~~pounds gutted weight (~~lb gw~~)~~ May through August for the rest of the area. From September through the end of the year, or until the ACL is met or projected to be met, the trip limit would be set at 100 ~~pounds gutted weight (~~lb gw~~)~~.

Sub-alternative 4a. 200 ~~pounds gutted weight (~~lb gw~~)~~.

Sub-alternative 4b. 250 ~~pounds gutted weight (~~lb gw~~)~~.

Sub-alternative 4c. 300 ~~pounds gutted weight (~~lb gw~~)~~.

The IPT recommends the changes shown above in Alternatives 1-4 in Action 4.

The IPT recommends that Alternative 4 in Action 4 not be analyzed by the IPT, and that it be sent to the, "Considered, but rejected appendix". The rationale is: catch data cannot be broken down by the geographical areas as depicted in the text of this alternative; and major assumptions including a high level of uncertainty would be involved in the data analysis for this alternative. Furthermore, Alternative 2 in Action 3 has sub-alternatives that appear to better capture the Council's intent.

The Snapper Grouper AP recommends that this action be moved to the considered but rejected appendix.

Note: Revised Alternative 4 was added as requested by the Snapper Grouper Committee Chair; preliminary analyses have been added and, if included, the economic, social, and administrative impacts will be added.

Revised Alternative 4. Maintain the current commercial snowy grouper trip limit of 100 lb gw all year or until the commercial ACL is met or projected to be met except for the period May through August from the Florida Volusia/Brevard County line north when the trip limit will be as follows:

Sub-alternative 4a. 200 pounds gutted weight (lb gw).
Sub-alternative 4b. 250 pounds gutted weight (lb gw).
Sub-alternative 4c. 300 pounds gutted weight (lb gw).

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should provide guidance on Action 4.

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR ALTERNATIVES 1-4 UNDER ACTION 4.

OPTION 2. MODIFY THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR ALTERNATIVES 1-4 UNDER ACTION 4 (COMMITTEE/COUNCIL TO SPECIFY CHANGES) AND APPROVE.

OPTION 3. APPROVE REVISED ALTERNATIVE 4 TO REPLACE THE CURRENT/MODIFIED ALTERNATIVE 4 UNDER ACTION 4

OPTION 4. APPROVE ALTERNATIVE X, SUB-ALTERNATIVE Y UNDER ACTION 4 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

OPTION 5. OTHERS???

2.3.1 Comparison of Alternatives

The biological effects of **Alternatives 1 (No Action), Alternative 2-4** and associated sub-alternatives would be expected to be neutral because ACLs and AMs are in place to cap harvest, and take action if ACLs are exceeded. Alternatives with larger trip limits (**Sub-alternative 2c**) could present a greater biological risk to snowy grouper in terms of exceeding the ACL since the rate of harvest would be greater. Larger trip limits could also result in earlier closures of snowy grouper, which can lead to an increased level of regulatory discards. Similarly smaller trip limits could increase bycatch if a trip is not ended and fishermen continue to target co-occurring species when the snowy grouper trip limit is met. Therefore, little difference in the biological effects of the trip limit alternatives is expected.

The costs and benefits to fishermen when considering changes in the commercial trip limit depend on if a longer season with a consistent supply of snowy grouper is more important than maximizing efficiency on fishing trips, even if the season is shorter in length. An additional consideration is the possibility that participation in the snowy grouper portion of the snapper grouper fishery may increase if the commercial trip limit is increased, because more fishermen would want to take advantage of the higher trip limit. Additional participation could increase competition, affect market supply and market prices, and contribute to a faster rate of harvest that closes snowy grouper harvest earlier than in recent years.

In general, commercial trip limits may help slow the rate of harvest, lengthen a season, and prevent the ACL from being exceeded. However, trip limits that are too low may make fishing trips inefficient and too costly if fishing grounds are too far away, which could affect business decisions and fishing behavior for commercial fishermen. The costs and benefits to fishermen when considering changes in the commercial trip limit depend on if a longer season with a consistent supply of snowy grouper is more important than maximizing efficiency on fishing trips, even if the season is shorter in length. An additional consideration is the possibility that participation in the snowy grouper portion of the snapper grouper fishery may increase if the commercial trip limit is increased, because more fishermen would want to take advantage of the higher trip limit. Additional participation could increase competition, affect market supply and market prices, and contribute to a faster rate of harvest that closes snowy grouper harvest earlier than in recent years. Another consideration in the South Atlantic is the time to travel to fishing grounds to catch snowy grouper varies among the different states (**Table 4.3.1** in **Section 4.3**). Each alternative under this action affects the different states in different ways, and will be analyzed by state below.

Because there is already a trip limit in place, there would be no difference in the administrative impacts of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 2** and its sub-alternatives. The administrative and law enforcement recourses currently used to implement and enforce the 100 lb gw commercial trip limit would be the same as those needed to implement and enforce the 300, 200, and 150 lb gw trip limits under **Sub-alternatives 2a, 2b,** and **2c,** respectively. **Alternative 3** would add to the administrative burden since it would include monitoring different trip limits during different times of the year. Therefore, administrative effects under **Sub-alternatives 3a** and **3b** would be slightly higher than under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 2** (and its sub-alternatives). In addition, the administrative effects could be greater for alternatives with higher trip limits because there is a greater chance that the ACL would be met and action would be needed to close the commercial sector.

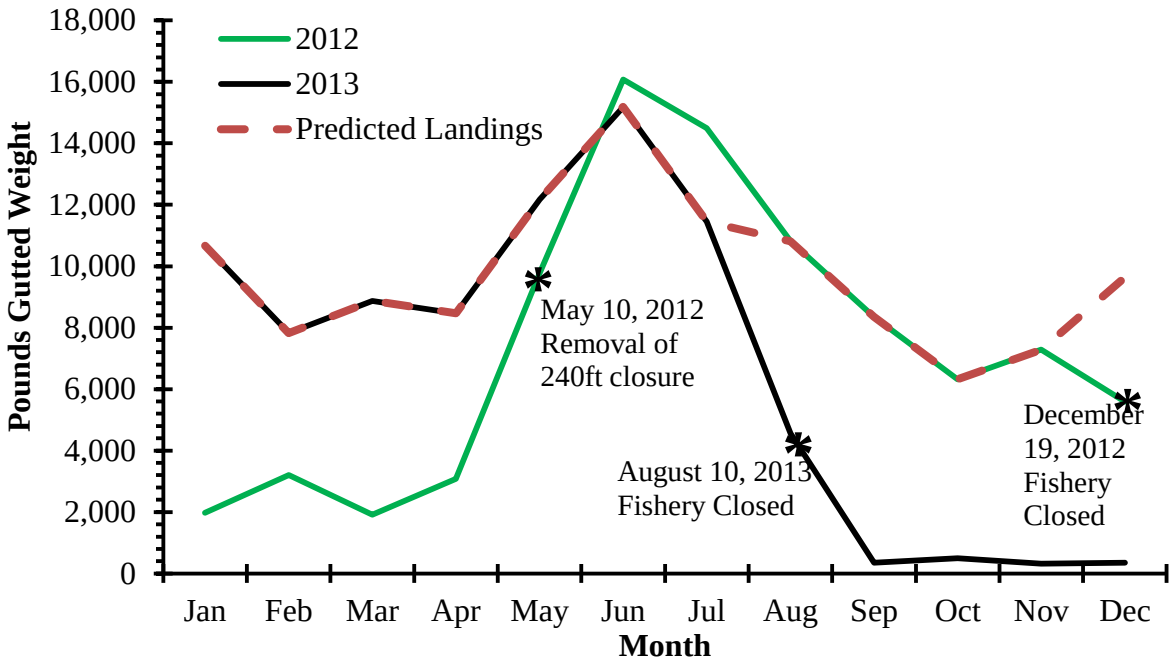


Figure 4.4.1. Monthly commercial snowy grouper landings in the South Atlantic for 2012 and 2013, and predicted landings for 2014. The predicted landings follow the months when the fishery was open and not impacted by the 240 ft closure implemented by Amendment 17B (SAFMC 2010b). The predicted landings for the month of December were generated by adjusting the December 2012 landings, since the fishery was not open for this entire month.

Table 4.4.1a. Monthly commercial snowy grouper landings in the South Atlantic for 2012 and 2013, and predicted landings for 2014. The predicted landings follow the months when the fishery was open and not impacted by the 240 ft closure implemented by Amendment 17B (SAFMC 2010b). The predicted landings for the month of December were generated by adjusting the December 2012 landings, since the fishery was not open for this entire month.

Month	2012	Cumulative	%Cumul.	2013	Cumulative	%Cumul.	Predicted	Cumulative	%Cumul.
Jan	1,978	1,978	2%	10,669	10,669	13%	10,669	10,669	9%
Feb	3,206	5,184	6%	7,825	18,494	23%	7,825	18,494	16%
Mar	1,909	7,093	8%	8,874	27,368	34%	8,874	27,368	23%
Apr	3,082	10,175	11%	8,469	35,837	44%	8,469	35,837	31%
May	9,776	19,951	22%	12,169	48,006	59%	12,169	48,006	41%
Jun	16,074	36,025	41%	15,186	63,192	78%	15,186	63,192	54%
Jul	14,497	50,522	57%	11,449	74,641	92%	11,449	74,641	64%
Aug	10,814	61,336	69%	4,556	79,197	98%	10,814	85,455	73%
Sep	8,351	69,687	78%	356	79,553	99%	8,351	93,806	80%
Oct	6,323	76,010	86%	501	80,054	99%	6,323	100,129	86%
Nov	7,286	83,296	94%	318	80,372	100%	7,286	107,415	92%
Dec	5,593	88,889	100%	356	80,728	100%	9,633	117,048	100%
Total	88,889			80,728			117,047		

Table 4.4.1b. Commercial and recreational landings (lbw w) of snowy grouper, by state, from 1996 to 2008 in the South Atlantic.

Commercial snowy grouper landings (lb ww).									
	FL	%FL	GA	%GA	NC	%NC	SC	%SC	Total
1996	144,904	43%	5,756	2%	123,223	36%	64,948	19%	338,831
1997	272,589	48%	10,453	2%	162,936	29%	116,607	21%	562,585
1998	151,407	44%	1,918	1%	123,210	36%	65,375	19%	341,910
1999	174,546	37%	7,429	2%	217,496	46%	73,965	16%	473,436
2000	140,261	35%	3,599	1%	186,788	46%	71,390	18%	402,038
2001	132,889	42%	4,957	2%	106,748	34%	73,488	23%	318,082
2002	127,457	44%	2,055	1%	110,614	39%	46,743	16%	286,869
2003	99,943	42%	7,585	3%	104,645	44%	27,336	11%	239,509
2004	96,120	37%	4,026	2%	97,470	37%	63,114	24%	260,730
2005	82,697	34%	2,550	1%	86,146	35%	72,440	30%	243,833
2006	69,239	27%	2,083	1%	102,567	41%	78,410	31%	252,299
2007	69,668	53%	672	1%	48,363	37%	13,450	10%	132,153
2008	46,087	54%	251	0%	26,714	31%	12,716	15%	85,768
Recreational snowy grouper landings (lb ww) excluding Monroe County.									
	FLE	%FLE	GA	%GA	NC	%NC	SC	%SC	Total
1996	732	17%	11	0%	1,213	27%	2,471	56%	4,427
1997	158,444	65%	21	0%	84,599	35%	177	1%	244,362
1998	3,750	84%		0%	563	13%		4%	4,491
1999	61,871	86%	16	0%	10,157	14%	109	0%	72,153
2000	4,056	16%		0%	22,055	84%	13	0%	26,123
2001	11,182	20%	3	0%	44,294	79%	495	1%	55,974
2002	655	3%	3	0%	20,694	96%	313	1%	21,665
2003	9,374	34%		0%	17,608	65%	245	1%	27,227
2004	47,075	65%		0%	24,824	35%	2	0%	71,901
2005	79,377	73%		0%	29,121	27%	303	0%	108,800
2006	154,839	91%		0%	14,498	9%		0%	169,337
2007	30,311	50%		0%	30,511	50%	163	0%	60,985
2008	2,184	13%		0%	14,798	87%	24	0%	17,006

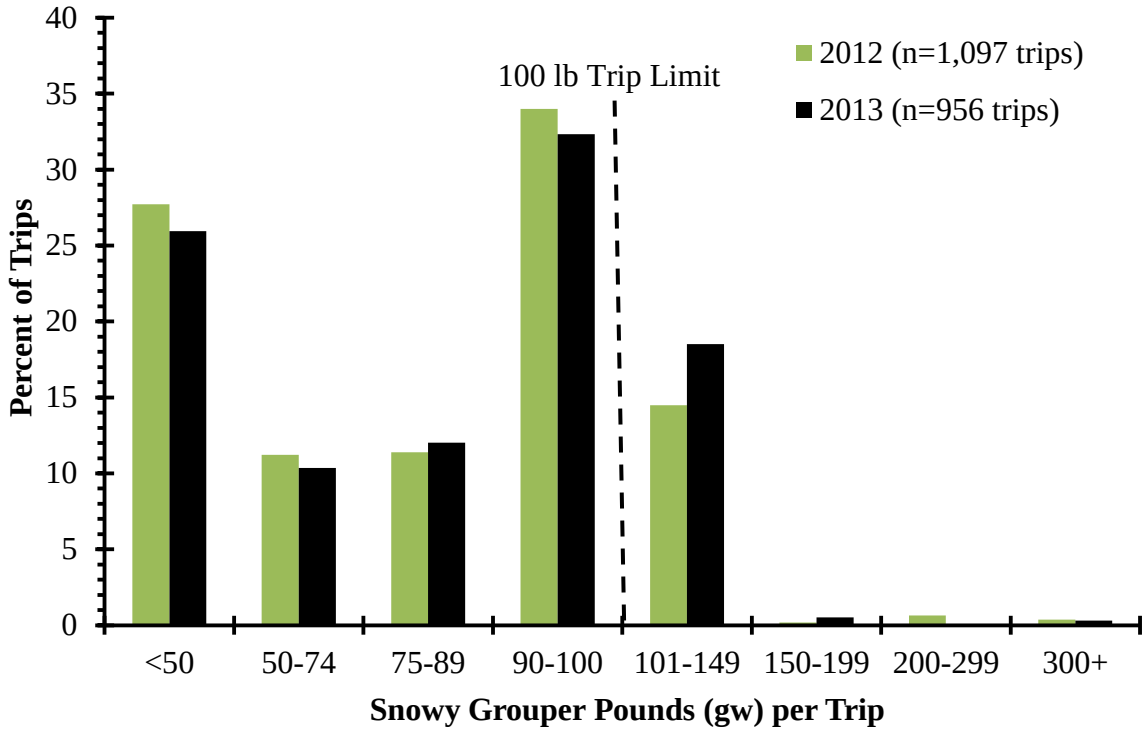


Figure 4.4.2. Frequency distribution of snowy grouper commercial landings per trip from 2012 to 2013 in the South Atlantic.

Table 4.4.1c. Percentage of South Atlantic snowy grouper commercial trips broken up into eight different trip bins for 2012 and 2013. Each trip bin represents pounds of snowy grouper landed per trip.

Trip Bin	2012	2013
	%	%
<50	27.7	25.9
50-74	11.2	10.4
75-89	11.4	12.0
90-100	34.0	32.3
101-149	14.5	18.5
150-199	0.2	0.5
200-299	0.6	0.0
300+	0.4	0.3
Total	100	100

Table 4.4.1d. Percent decreases and increases in monthly landings for various commercial snowy grouper trip limits under **Alternatives 2** and **3** in **Action 4**. The current trip limit is 100 lb gw.

Month	Trip Limit			
	50 lb gw	150 lb gw	200 lb gw	300 lb gw
Jan	-58.6	+27.1	+56.9	+117.2
Feb	-59.1	+29.0	+58.6	+118.0
Mar	-44.6	+26.6	+55.3	+113.6
Apr	-49.6	+36.1	+72.2	+144.4
May	-58.4	+35.7	+71.6	+143.4
Jun	-55.5	+34.2	+70.3	+142.7
Jul	-57.4	+30.3	+61.5	+124.1
Aug	-59.1	+27.3	+54.3	+109.5
Sep	-57.2	+31.7	+63.8	+128.9
Oct	-55.4	+32.1	+65.6	+135.2
Nov	-53.9	+28.5	+58.9	+121.2
Dec	-48.4	+31.9	+67.0	+137.3

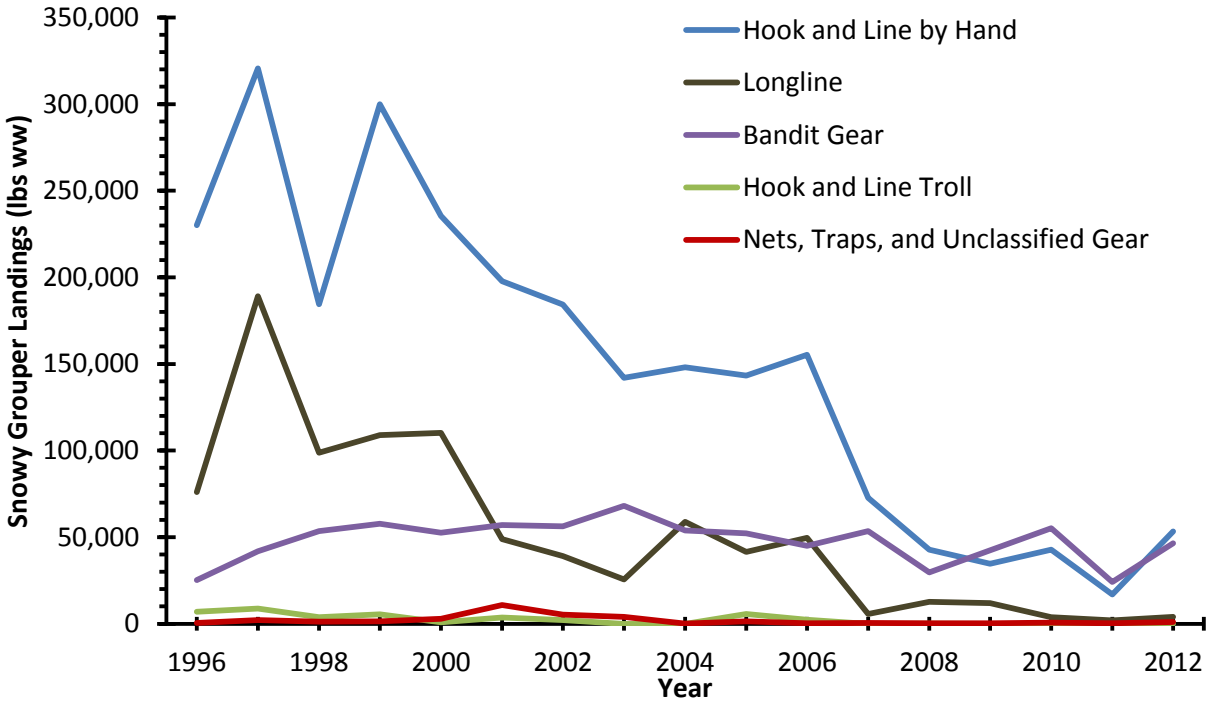


Figure 4.4.3. Annual commercial landings of snowy grouper by gear type in the South Atlantic during 1996-2012.

Table 4.4.2. Predicted closure dates for the snowy grouper commercial fishery in the South Atlantic for different proposed trip limits and ACLs included in **Actions 4** and **2** in Regulatory Amendment 20.

Action 2: ACL Alternatives	**Action 4: Trip Limit Alternatives**					
	Alt. 1	**Sub-Alt. 2a**	**Sub-Alt. 2b**	**Sub-Alt. 2c**	**Sub-Alt. 3a**	**Sub-Alt. 3b**
	100 lb gw	300 lb gw	200 lb gw	150 lb gw	150 lb gw Jan-Apr 50 lb gw May-Dec	150 lb gw Jan-Apr 100 lb gw May-Dec
Alt. 1 (current ACL = 82,900 lb gw)	24-Aug	4-May	6-Jun	30-Jun	No Closure	25-Jul
Alt. 2 (100% ABC from SEDAR 36, 75% F_{MSY}) ACL = 132,143 lb gw	No Closure	19-Jun	18-Aug	3-Nov	No Closure	No Closure
Sub-Alt. 3a (95% ABC) ACL = 125,536 lb gw)	No Closure	14-Jun	6-Aug	10-Oct	No Closure	25-Dec
Sub-Alt. 3b (90% ABC) ACL = 118,929 lb gw	No Closure	8-Jun	25-Jul	19-Sep	No Closure	3-Dec
Sub-Alt. 3c (85% ABC) ACL = 112,322 lb gw	16-Dec	3-Jun	14-Jul	1-Sep	No Closure	7-Nov

Table 4.4.3. Predicted closure dates for the South Atlantic snowy grouper commercial fishery by applying three different increased trip limits for the area north of Brevard County, Florida, under the revised **Alternative 4** in **Action 4**.

Action 2: ACL Alternatives	Revised Alternative 4		
	Sub-alt 4a	**Sub-alt 4b**	**Sub-alt 4c**
	200 lbs gw	250 lbs gw	300 lbs gw
Alt. 1 ACL (82,900 lbs gw)	21-Jul	11-Jul	3-Jul
Alt. 2 ACL (132,143 lbs gw)	22-Dec	21-Nov	12-Oct
Alt. 3a ACL (125,536 lbs gw)	1-Dec	24-Oct	15-Sep
Alt. 3b ACL (118,929 lbs gw)	3-Nov	24-Sep	28-Aug
Alt. 3c ACL (112,322 lbs gw)	3-Oct	31-Aug	17-Aug

2.5 Action 5. Modify the Recreational Bag Limit for Snowy Grouper

(Note: The Accountability Measures (AMs) are being addressed in the Generic Accountability Measure/Dolphin Allocation Amendment.)

Alternative 1. (No Action.) The current recreational grouper bag and possession limit is as ~~management measures are as~~ follows:

- Grouper and tilefish, combined--3. Within the 3-fish aggregate bag limit: No more than one fish may be gag or black grouper, combined; no more than one fish per vessel may be a snowy grouper; no more than one fish may be a golden tilefish; and no goliath grouper or Nassau grouper may be retained.
- ~~Part of Aggregate Grouper Bag Limit of 3/person/day of: gag, black grouper, snowy grouper, misty grouper, red grouper, scamp, yellowedge grouper, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, sand tile, coney, graysby, red hind and rock hind with a limit of 1 snowy grouper per vessel per day.~~

- ~~Sale of recreationally caught fish prohibited.~~

Alternative 2. Modify the recreational snowy grouper bag limit from 1/vessel/day to 1/vessel/day May through August and no retention during the rest of the year.

Alternative 3. Modify the recreational snowy grouper bag limit from 1/vessel/day year round to 1/vessel/day during May and June with no retention during the remainder of the year ~~and based on 2012 recreational harvest. However, if future catches were similar to 2013 recreational harvest (Table9) recreational landings would be below the expected recreational ACL~~.

The IPT recommends deleting text after, "….during the remainder of the year" in Alternative 3. Text for Alternative 3 in Action 5 would read, "Alternative 3. Modify the recreational snowy grouper bag limit from 1/vessel/day year round to 1/vessel/day during May and June with no retention during the remainder of the year".

Alternative 4. Modify the recreational snowy grouper bag limit from 1/vessel/day year round to 1/vessel/day during May with no retention during the remainder of the year.

Alternative 5. Modify the recreational snowy grouper bag limit from 1/vessel/day year round to 1/vessel/day during June with no retention during the remainder of the year.

The IPT recommends using the most recent two years of data (2012 and 2013), for data analysis (recreational data sets and commercial logbook) due to regulatory changes. Analysis of data from any other time period would need to be stated explicitly in the amendment.

The IPT requests clarification whether Alternatives 2-4 would continue to include snowy grouper in the current grouper aggregate bag limit.

The Snapper Grouper AP chose Alternative 4 as their preferred alternative.

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should provide guidance on Action 5.

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR ALTERNATIVES 1 & 3 UNDER ACTION 5.

OPTION 2. MODIFY THE IPT'S PROPOSED WORDING FOR ALTERNATIVES 1 & 3 UNDER ACTION 5 (COMMITTEE/COUNCIL TO SPECIFY CHANGES) AND APPROVE.

OPTION 3. CLARIFY THAT THE COUNCIL'S INTENT IS THAT SNOWY GROUPER REMAIN WITHIN THE AGGREGATE GROUPER BAG LIMIT IN ALTERNATIVES 2-4 UNDER ACTION 5

OPTION 4. APPROVE ALTERNATIVE X UNDER ACTION 5 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

OPTION 5. OTHERS???

2.5.1 Comparison of Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action) would provide the least biological benefit since the recreational ACL has been exceeded by 400% in the recent years under the status quo. However, the ACL in 2013 was exceeded because recreational fishermen continued to land snowy grouper after the recreational sector had been closed. **Alternatives 2-5** would retain snowy grouper within the grouper aggregate but restrict the number of months each year that the species could be landed. **Alternatives 4** and **5** would be expected to have higher biological benefits than **Alternatives 2** and **3**, since they would allow the recreational harvest of snowy grouper for just one month versus two months under **Alternative 3** and four months under **Alternative 2**. However, the biological effects of **Alternatives 1-5** would be similar if a recreational closure does not slow the rate of fishing. The spawning season for snowy grouper in the Carolinas is from April through September with no obvious peak period (Wyanski et al. 2000, 2013). In the Florida Keys, Moore and Labinsky (1984) reported snowy grouper in spawning condition from April through July. Wyanski et al. (2000) also suggested that snowy grouper may form spawning aggregations after they captured 1,160 specimens (some of which were assessed macroscopically as spawning) from four trawl collections of squid in June 1978. Most species of fish in general, do not reach their maximum reproductive potential very early in the spawning season (Reference). Therefore, **Alternative 4**, which would allow for recreational harvest of snowy grouper in May could be expected to have the highest biological benefit of all the alternatives in **Action 5**.

Based simply on the amount of time allowed for retention of snowy grouper, it is likely that **Alternatives 4** and **5** would provide the highest long-run economic benefits because those have the least amount of risk associated with exceeding the ACL due to a one-month season only. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would be the least preferred of the five alternatives because it has the longest amount of time when retention is allowed and is therefore likely most harmful to the biological health of the stock and unlikely, assuming current harvest trends, to result in higher future landings. However, recreational landings make up a small part of the overall landings of snowy grouper, and SEDAR 36 (2013) indicates overfishing has been ended, and the stock is rebuilding despite recreational overages.

In general, the social effects of modifying the snowy grouper bag limit or specifying when snowy grouper can be recreationally landed would be associated with the biological costs of each alternative (see **Section 4.5.1**), but also considering the times of year recreational anglers are targeting snowy grouper and how a designated recreational fishing season would affect current recreational fishing opportunities. Although recreational landings make up only a small portion of the overall landings of snowy grouper, there has been an overage of almost or over 400% in recent years for recreational ACL. The lack of in-season closure and a continual overage of the recreational sector could result in negative effects on the snowy grouper stock, particularly in combination with other factors that could affect the stock. However, despite the recent overages in the recreational sector, SEDAR 36 (2013) indicates that overfishing is no longer occurring and the snowy grouper stock is rebuilding.

The restrictive existing bag limit (**Alternative 1 (No Action)** could be limiting recreational opportunities. **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2**, and **Alternative 3** would be expected to result in negative effects on resource users if negative biological effects on the stock occur due to continued overages of the recreational ACL. Allowing a one-fish bag limit for only one month under **Alternative 4** and **5** would minimize negative effects on fishermen due to any resulting biological costs of recreational overages, but would further restrict recreational access to snowy grouper.

The administrative effects between **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternatives 2** through **5** would not be considered to very different from one another. Bag limits are already monitored and enforced under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. **Alternatives 2** through **5** would not add to the administrative burden in the form of cost, time, or law enforcement efforts, except for incorporating changes to the bag limits and time of year they would apply, which are considered routine.

Table 4.5.1. Recreational landings (numbers of fish) and closures using numbers from the SERO-Annual Catch Limits dataset (excluding Monroe County) for 2012-2013.

Species	Year	Fishing Season	Total Landings (N)	ACL (N)	ACL %	Closure Date
Snowy Grouper*	2012	Jan 1 - Dec 31	2,065	523	395 %	
	2013		2,150	523	411 %	05/31/13

The accountability measure for snowy grouper required that the 2013 fishing season be shortened if the average 2010-2012 recreational landings exceeded the ACL. Note: For 2012, the average 2010-2012 should have been used and for 2011, the average of 2010 and 2011 landings should have been used.
*Recreational ACL for snowy grouper did not exist until Amendment 17B (SAFMC 2010b) was implemented on January 31, 2011. The recreational allocation was established in Amendment 15B (SAFMC 2008b) and implemented on 12/16/09; however, the recreational AM was established in Amendment 17B (SAFMC 2010b).
Source: SERO web-site: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/acl_monitoring/recreational_sa/index.html

Table 4.5.2. Recreational landings (numbers of fish) by wave (two-month intervals) of snowy grouper in the South Atlantic (excluding Monroe County, Florida).

Year	Jan/Feb (Wave 1)	Mar/Apr (Wave 2)	May/June (Wave 3)	July/Aug (Wave 4)	Sept/Oct (Wave 5)	Nov/Dec (Wave 6)	Total
2012	2	1	1,049	651	330	32	2,065
2013	77	238	112	330	1,332	62	2,150

Source: SERO-ACL dataset.

Table 4.5.3. Recreational landings (numbers of fish) by wave (two-month intervals) of snowy grouper in the South Atlantic. Snowy grouper landings with (Total SA Landings) and without (Current SA Landings) landings from Monroe County are included. Specific Monroe County Headboat landings were not provided to protect confidentiality of the data.

Year	Source	Jan/Feb	Mar/Apr	May/June	July/Aug	Sept/Oct	Nov/Dec	Total
2012	MRFSS	0	0	1,039	644	322	0	2,005
	Headboat	2	1	10	7	8	32	60
	Current SA Landings	2	1	1,049	651	330	32	2,065
	Monroe MRFSS	0	82	15,200	0	0	0	15,282
	Monroe Headboat	0	0	0	<10	0	<10	<20
	Total SA Landings	2	83	16,249	661	330	42	17,367
2013	MRFSS	67	226	107	330	972	0	1,701
	Headboat	10	12	5	0	360	62	449
	Current SA Landings	77	238	112	330	1,332	62	2,150
	Monroe MRFSS	0	0	1,247	0	0	0	1,247
	Monroe Headboat	0	0	0	0	<400	<100	<500
	Total SA Landings	77	238	1,359	330	1,732	162	3,897

Table 4.5.4. Actual snowy grouper harvest by sector from 2005 through 2012 from the SERO-Annual Catch Limits dataset. Current allocation = 95% commercial, 5% recreational.

	Commercial	% Harvested	Recreational	% Harvested	Total
Year	(ww)	by Comm	(ww)	by Rec	(ww)
2005	243,833	69%	108,800	31%	352,633
2006	252,299	60%	169,337	40%	421,636
2007	132,154	68%	60,985	32%	193,139
2008	85,768	83%	17,006	17%	102,775
2009	89,225	54%	77,173	46%	166,398
2010	102,245	68%	48,123	32%	150,368
2011	43,473	97%	1,496	3%	44,969
2012	104,889	69%	46,176	31%	151,065

The following tables are from the Options Paper used at the March 2014 Snapper Grouper Committee meeting. These are included for discussion purposes.

Table 7. Recreational harvest versus recreational ACL using numbers from the quota monitoring system (excluding Monroe County) and from the recent SEDAR assessment (including Monroe County).

Snowy Grouper recreational harvest in numbers of fish						
Year	Recreational*	Current ACL	QMS**			
2005	20,789					
2006	18,772					
2007	4,623					
2008	2,557					
2009	5,584	523				
2010	5,892	523	2,066			
2011	147	523	151			
2012	16,688	523	2,065			
2013			1,976			
*These numbers include Monroe County; current ABC/ACLs do not						
**Numbers of fish from the quota monitoring system exclued Monroe County.						

Table 8. Recreational landings (numbers of fish) and closures using numbers from the quota monitoring system (excluding Monroe County) for 2011-2013.

Species	Year	Fishing Season	Total Landings (N)	ACL (N)	ACL %	Closure Date
Snowy Grouper**	2013	Jan 1 - Dec 31	1,976*	523	378%	05/31/13
	2012		2,065	523	395%	
	2011		151	523	28.9%	

*Data through October 2013; the accountability measure for snowy grouper required that the 2013 fishing season be shortened if the average 2010-2012 recreational landings exceeded the ACL. Note: For 2012, the average 2010-2012 should have been used and for 2011, the average of 2010 and 2011 landings should have been used.

**Recreational ACL for snowy grouper did not exist until Amendment 17B to the Snapper Grouper FMP was implemented on January 31, 2011. Check: The recreational allocation was established in Amendment 15B implemented 12/16/09; however, the AM was established in Amendment 17B.

Source: SERO web-site:
http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/acl_monitoring/recreational_sa/index.html

Table 9. Actual snowy grouper harvest by sector from 2005 through 2012.

Year	Commercial (ww)	% Harvested by Comm	Recreational (ww)	% Harvested by Rec	Total (ww)
2005	223,785	45%	268,486	55%	492,271
2006	228,452	48%	245,179	52%	473,631
2007	115,171	61%	74,131	39%	189,302
2008	77,814	71%	31,148	29%	108,962
2009	79,916	54%	68,701	46%	148,617
2010	90,976	49%	94,715	51%	185,691
2011	40,968	98%	860	2%	41,828
2012	95,869	50%	95,309	50%	191,178

Notes: SG Am 13C, effective 10/23/06, established a commercial trip limit 275 lbs gw in 2006, 175 in 2007, and 100 2008 onwards. SG Am 15B, effective 12/16/09 implemented a com ACL = 82,900 lbs gw and rec ACL = 523 fish; (commercial ACL = 97,812 lbs ww and recreational ACL = 5,148 lbs ww). SG Am 15B also established the commercial (95%) & recreational (5%) allocations.

Note: The ABC = ACL = 102,960 lbs ww for 2009 onwards. The ACL and ABC were exceeded each year from 2009 through 2012 except 2011.

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should discuss the difference in landings from the ACL database (Table 4.5.4) and the SEDAR assessment (Table 9 above) and provide guidance to staff.

The following information is taken directly from Snapper Grouper Amendment 13C. This information is included for discussion purposes to demonstrate how the harvest by state has changed due to regulations.

3.4.1 Description of Fishing Practices, Vessels, and Gear

3.4.1.1 Commercial Fishery

There are four legal methods of harvest in the commercial snapper grouper fishery. Species can be harvested by black sea bass pot, vertical line (handline, hydraulic, or electric), longline, and by diving (utilizing powerheads or spears except where prohibited in the EEZ). An economic survey of commercial snapper grouper vessels along the South Atlantic coast done in the mid-nineties found "average length of boats was 32.7 feet, with nearly all sampled boats being less than 50 feet in length. Boats with bottom longlines tended to be the longest, had the most powerful engines, the greatest fuel capacities, and the largest holding boxes for fish and ice. Boats with vertical lines, especially in the southern area, tended to be the shortest, had the least powerful engines, the smallest fuel capacities, and the smallest holding boxes for fish and ice" (Waters *et al*. 1997).

Gear types

Vertical Lines
The vertical line sector of the commercial fishery operates throughout the Council's area of jurisdiction from the North Carolina/Virginia border to the Atlantic side of Key West, Florida. According to NMFS Logbook data there were 15,302 trips reported in 2001 in which hook and line gear was identified as the main gear for that trip. This fishery takes place in about 13 to 110 fathoms (78-660 feet) of water both during day and night.

The majority of hook and line fishermen use either electric or hydraulic reels known as "bandit" gear due to its resemblance to one-armed bandit machines used in casinos. Boats generally have 2-4 bandit reels attached. A typical bandit reel is attached to the gunwale of the boat and consists of a fiberglass reel that holds about 1,000 feet of cable; an L-bar or spreader, which keeps the leader from tangling with the main line; a pulley to feed the cable from the reel through the L-bar; a fiberglass arm; and an electronic or hydraulic reel motor (Figure 3-2).

Figure 3-2. Bandit reel used in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery.

Captains will "work the break" maneuvering the boat back and forth across an area of high relief running northeast and southwest looking for fish using a color machine and relying on fishing spots that have been previously marked on their plotter. The captain will use the color machine to differentiate bottom type and fish presence and type. A captain can tell what kind of fish may be in the area based on where they appear in the water column, the size of the air bladder that shows up on the screen, and how the fish are congregated.

Fishing begins with a baited line that is thrown out over the gunwale of the boat as the fisherman releases the drag on the spool of the bandit reel and sends the line down in search of the bottom or desired depth. If dropping on a spot for the first time, the fishermen may have to adjust the depth at which he fishes, first finding the bottom and then reeling up the line enough to be fishing above the bottom.

When using bandit gear in the mid-shelf fishery (mostly targeting vermilion snapper and some groupers) fishermen tend to either "sit and soak" or "get up and down". When fishermen sit and soak they are fishing live or dead baits with circle or "jap" hooks and letting their rigs (generally a 20-40 foot leader with 2 hooks) soak near the bottom for anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. Fishermen will use this method to catch grouper and some snapper such as red snapper in about 13-50 fathoms (78-300 feet) of water.

Another method is often called "getting up and down" where fishermen are actively fishing 2-3 straight hooks per reel with cut bait. When fishermen fish this way, the line is being tended constantly and brought up to the surface as soon as a bite is felt. Most vermilion snapper, triggerfish, and porgies are caught this way. Fishermen also fish for grouper using this method but with bigger hooks.

When fishing for deepwater snapper grouper species (primarily targeting snowy grouper, but also catching large red porgy, blueline tilefish, Warsaw grouper, and speckled hind) in 50-100 fathoms (300-600 feet) of water they bait multi-hook rigs (with anywhere from 2-10 circle hooks) with squid, Boston mackerel, or other cut bait.

In South Florida, there is also a yellowtail snapper fishery. This is mostly a day boat fishery. Fishermen chum for yellowtail, by grinding or cutting up bait fish and distributing the chum on top of the water with the intention of drawing the yellowtail snapper closer to surface in a school to make them easier to catch. The fish are caught on handlines with "j" hooks and then chill-killed for high quality. Sometimes these fishermen will use a splatter or spider pole to catch the fish when chumming. This is a 10-12 foot bamboo pole with a single line and a barb-less hook attached that is sometimes used when fishermen are "power" chumming (using a lot of chum in a giant chum bag off the back of the boat) because it helps bring the fish to the boat faster.

There is no consistent day/night pattern with the vertical line fishery. What time of day to fish varies from captain to captain and is a matter of personal preference. The majority of the bandit fleet fishes year round for snapper grouper. The only seasonal differences in catch are associated with the regulatory spawning season closures in March and April for gag. Most fluctuations in fishing effort in this fishery are a result of the weather. Trips can be limited during hurricane season and also during the winter months (December through March). Some fishermen will stop bandit fishing to target king mackerel when they are running.

Longline

The Council allows the use of bottom longlines only in depths greater than 50 fathoms and only north of St. Lucie Inlet, Florida. In the snapper grouper fishery bottom longlines are used to target golden tilefish and snowy grouper; there is also incidental catch of blueline tilefish and blackbelly rosefish.

Typically, longline boats, which operate in the snapper grouper fishery, are bigger than bandit boats, their trips are longer, and they cost more to operate because they operate farther offshore. From a port such as Charleston, South Carolina vessels will travel 90 miles offshore to reach the fishing grounds, staying out for as many as 9 or 10 days and incurring $2,500 worth of expenses.

The longline is located on a spool about midway back on the stern deck of the boat. In this fishery, a spool generally holds about 15 miles of cable. When fishing begins, the cable is paid out through a fair lead on top of the spool and then another one at the stern of the boat. A poly ball and a high flyer are paid out first to mark the longline at one end.

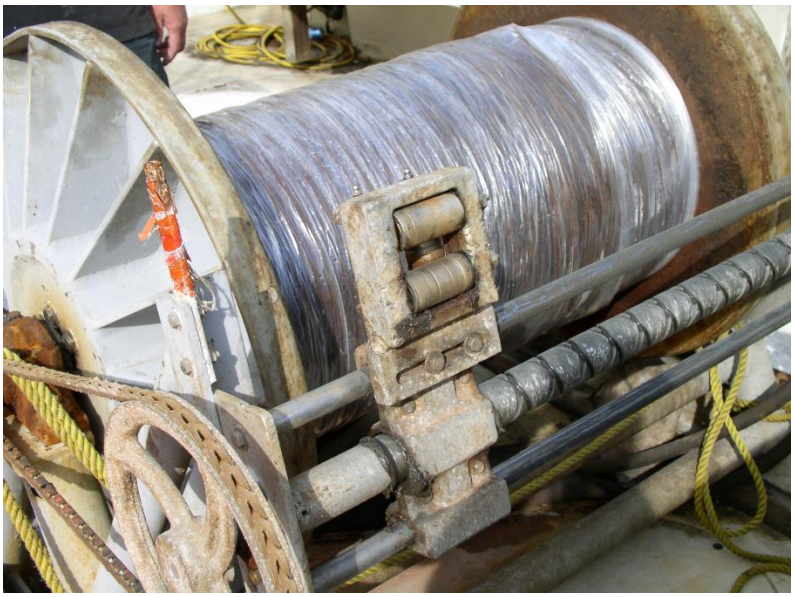


Figure 3-3. A spool on a longline vessel from the South Atlantic snapper grouper bottom longline fishery.

At the stern are usually two crew members who stand near baskets full of made up rigs (previously baited hooks and leaders). As the line pays out, they snap the leaders onto the mainline as fast as possible but generally every two feet.

While the line is paying out the Captain of the boat may steer the boat in a zig-zag fashion or make exaggerated turns to set the gear in the ideal location. Some people will use weights as they make big turns to prevent the mainline from rolling over and drifting on top of itself. When the desired amount of longline is paid out, the crew will break it loose from the drum and snap on another poly-ball and high flyer to indicate then end of the longline.

The amount of mainline that is paid out and the length of soak time of the line varies by boat and by circumstance. Sometimes boats will set out 5 miles of cable at a time making as many as four or more sets a day while some will set out 15 miles at a time and only make two sets a day. Soak time will vary depending on how fishing is going. After the line is set the crew may stop and rest, letting the line soak for thirty minutes or so and then haul back beginning at the end they just finished paying out. Another method would be to go back to the beginning of the longline and start hauling back from that end. The longest amount of time that gear would be fishing in the water would be about two hours.

The gear is hauled back from a haul back station with a boom that swings out over the side of the boat that helps feed the cable through a block and pulley system. As the line is hauled back on the boat, catch is removed from the leaders and the main line is fed back into the level wind and back to the spool.

Longlines are only fished from daylight to dark. There are sea lice that come out at night and eat the flesh of the fish that would hook up on the line, preventing nighttime fishing. This fishery is operated all year long with little or no seasonal fluctuation barring a busy hurricane season.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 13C, Section 4:

Landings information

During 1999-2003, 73% of the commercial catch was with hook and line gear and 27% was with longline gear. Most snowy grouper were landed off North Carolina followed by East Florida and Monroe County, Florida (Table 4-3).

Table 4-3. The percentage of snowy grouper landed by state during 1999-2003.
Source: NMFS Accumulative Landings System.

Area	Percent
Monroe County	18.2
Eastern Florida	14.3
Georgia	1.5
South Carolina	23.2
North Carolina	42.7

Landing peaked in 1997 at 718,000 lbs whole weight but decreased to 298,000 lbs whole weight in 2003 (Figure 4-1). Regulations, which may have affected the catch of snowy grouper, are shown in Table 4-4 and Figure 4-1.

Table 4-4. Snowy grouper regulations.

Regulation	Effective Date	Plan or Amendment
Prohibit trawls	1/12/89	Amendment 1 (SAFMC 1988)
Prohibit fish traps, entanglement nets & longlines within 50 fathoms; 5 grouper bag limit; rebuilding timeframe	1/1/92	Amendment 4 (SAFMC 1991)
Commercial quota phased-in: 540,314 lbs gutted weight in 1994 442,448 lbs gutted weight in 1995 344,508 lbs gutted weight in 1996 onwards; Commercial trip limits = 2,500 lb (gutted); Commercial bycatch limit = 300 lbs (gutted); Snowy grouper added to grouper aggregate bag limit; Established *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area	6/27/94	Amendment 6 (SAFMC 1993)
Limited entry program: transferable permits and 225-lb non-transferable permits	12/98	Amendment 8 (SAFMC 1997)
Vessels with longlines may only possess deepwater species	2/24/99	Amendment 9 (SAFMC 1998c)

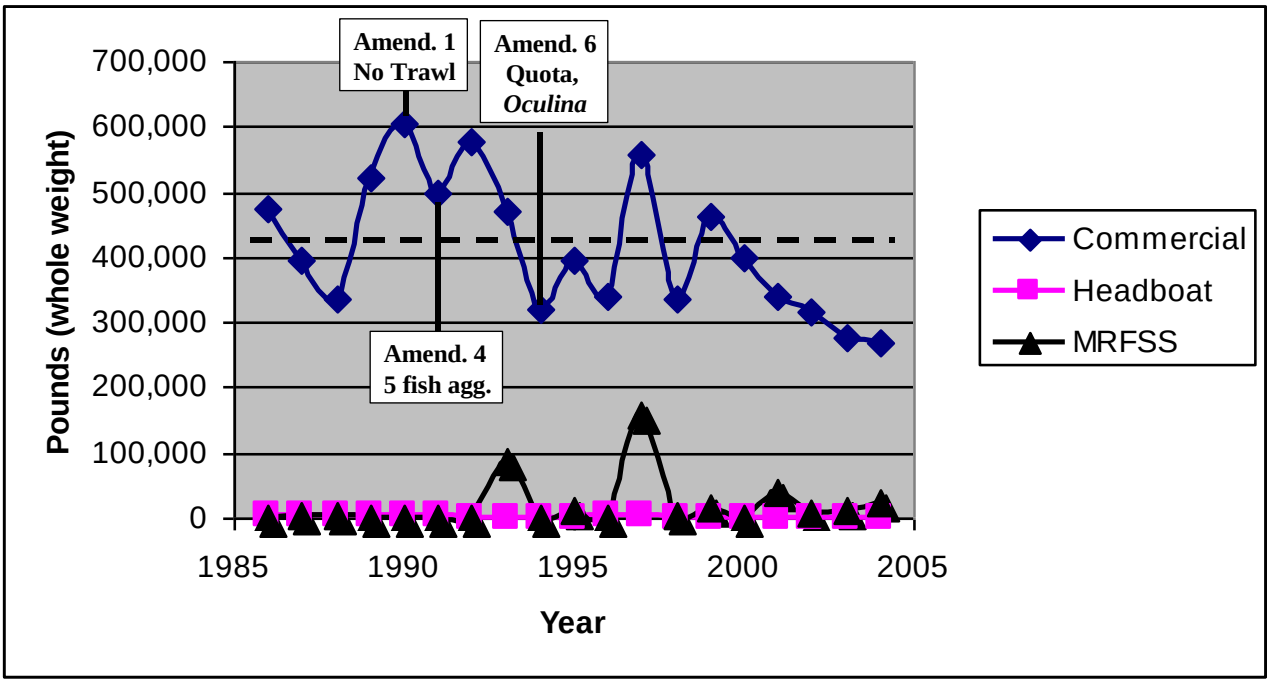


Figure 4-1. Annual landings (lbs whole weight) of snowy grouper 1986-2004. Commercial landings are from the NMFS Accumulative Landings System (ALS), Headboat data are from NMFS-Beaufort, and MRFSS data are from the MRFSS web site. Dotted line represents quota of 344,508 lbs gutted weight (406,519 lbs whole weight) implemented in 1994.

Snowy grouper are primarily taken by commercial fishermen (Figure 4-2). Recreational catch is minor because this is a deep water species. Based on data from ALS, MRFSS, and the Headboat Survey, recreational landings made up about 4% of the landings during 1999-2003. The mean length of snowy grouper taken with all commercial gear decreased from an average of 25.3" total length in 1984 to 21.1" total length in 2003 (Figure 4-3). The mean length of snowy grouper taken by headboat and recreational fishermen also exhibited declining trends during 1984-2003; however, there was considerable fluctuation due to the small sample sizes.

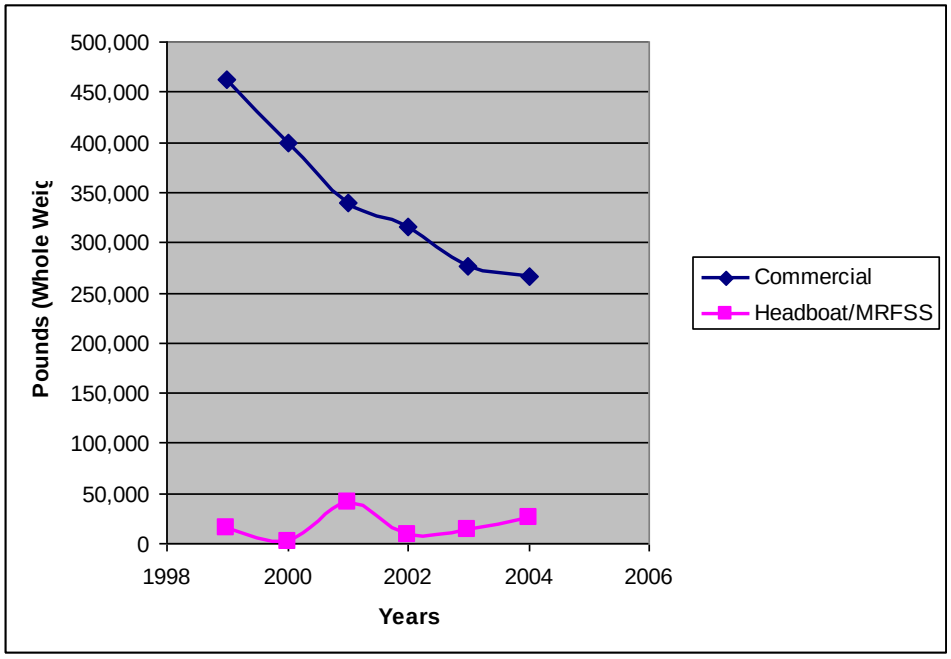


Figure 4-2. Annual landings (lbs whole weight) of snowy grouper (1999-2004). Commercial landings are from the NMFS Accumulative Landings System (ALS), Headboat data are from NMFS-Beaufort, and MRFSS data are from the MRFSS web site.

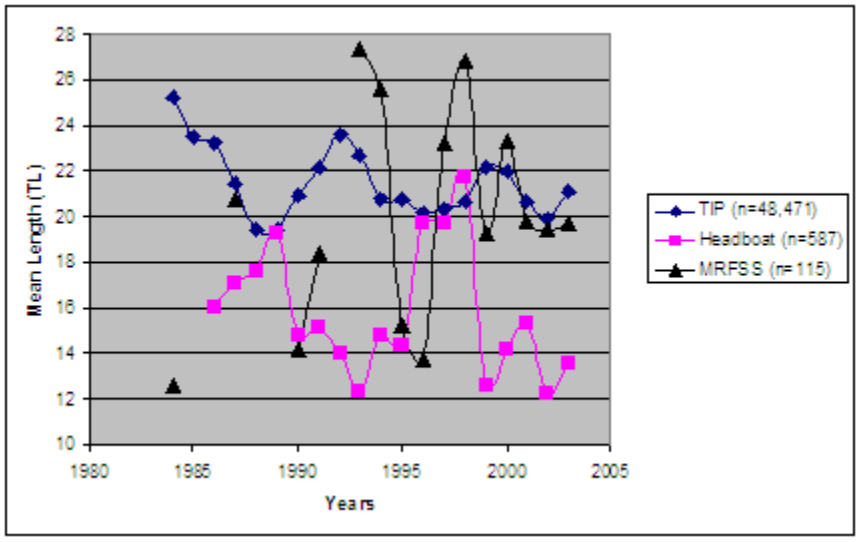


Figure 4-3. Mean lengths (inches, total length) of snowy grouper taken by commercial, headboat, and recreational (MRFSS) fishermen during 1984-2003.

Compliance

The quota is tracked in gutted weight. Current quotas (in lbs gutted weight) are provided in Table 4-5.

Table 4-5. Current commercial quota (lbs gutted weight) for snowy grouper.

Fishery	TAC (Pounds)	Bycatch Set-Aside (Pounds)	Directed Quota (Pounds)
Snowy Grouper	440,508	96,000	344,508

The snowy grouper trip limit is 2,500 lbs until the directed quota is met, then the trip limit decreases to 300 lbs to account for incidental catch (bycatch) while fishing for other species.

The directed quota was exceeded in August 1997; however, the trip limit was not reduced to 300 lbs until December 20 through December 31, 1997. This resulted in catches exceeding the TAC by 31,470 lbs or 7%. The directed quota was also exceeded in November 1999; however, the trip limit was not reduced prior to the end of the year. This did not result in the TAC being exceeded (388,210 lbs harvested; 52,298 lbs or 12% below the TAC). The last time catches exceeded the directed quota was in October 2000 and the snowy grouper trip limit was reduced to 300 lbs effective 12:01 a.m., local time, October 1, 2000 through December 31, 2000 [65 Federal Register 56801]. However, the TAC was not exceeded; catches were 90,842 lbs (21%) below the TAC.

The directed quota was not exceeded in 1998 (35% or 154,201 lbs below quota), 2001 (34% or 149,804 lbs below quota), 2002, 2003, or 2004. The trend of landings thus far in 2005 indicates the directed quota will not be exceeded although weather may be an important factor. The numbers of hurricanes by year is presented in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6. Number of hurricanes by year affecting the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council area.

Year	Number Hurricanes in SAFMC Area
1997	-
1998	1 off NC
1999	3 off East Coast
2000	-
2001	4 off NC
2002	-
2003	1 off NC
2004	2 off East Coast

Public Hearings - will be held from 4-7 pm at the following locations:

August 6, 2014 North Myrtle Beach, SC Bay Watch Resort & Conference Center 2701 S. Ocean Boulevard N. Myrtle Beach, SC 29582 Phone: 252-240-1155	**August 7, 2014** Crystal Coast Civic Center 3505 Arendell Street Morehead City, NC 28557 Phone: 252-247-3883
August 11, 2014 Key West Marriott Beachside 3841 North Roosevelt Boulevard Key West, FL 33040 Phone: 305-296-8100	**August 12, 2014** Doubletree by Hilton Oceanfront 2080 North Atlantic Ave. Cocoa Beach, FL 32931 Phone: 321-783-9222
August 13, 2014 Wyndham Jacksonville Riverwalk 1515 Prudential Drive Jacksonville, FL 32207 Phone: 904-396-5100	**August 14, 2014** Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum 175 Bourne Avenue Pooler, GA 31322 Phone: 912-743-8888

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should provide guidance on approving Regulatory Amendment 20 (Snowy Grouper) for public hearings.

OPTION 1. APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 20 (SNOWY GROUPER) FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

OPTION 2. DO NOT APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 20 (SNOWY GROUPER) FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

OPTION 3. OTHERS???

Timing 2013/14:

a. SSC reviews assessment – ~~October 2013~~ April 2014
b. Council receives assessment results and SSC recommendations – ~~December 2013~~ June 2014. Provide guidance on actions/alternatives to be included.
c. Using Existing Framework Procedure: Draft Existing Framework Document: review, modify & approve for public hearings – ~~December 2013~~ June 2014
d. Public Hearings – ~~January~~ August 2014
e. Review public hearing comments, modify amendment as necessary, and approve for formal review and implementation – ~~March~~ September 2014
f. Document preparation for formal review:
    1. IPT leads review completed by _____.
    2. Council chair reviews document & proposed rule by _____ .
    3. Comments from SERO and NOAA GC received on _____.
    4. Council staff completes final review of document & proposed rule by_____
    5. Corrections made by _____.
g. SAFMC sends to NMFS for formal review by ~~March/April 2013~~ October/November 2014. Target September 2014. Done ____/14.
h. Proposed Rule published _____/14.
    1. Send to Council, AP & SSC
    2. Comments due by ____/14.
i. Final Rule published _____/15. Note: Fishery Bulletin published on _____15.
    1. Send to Council, AP & SSC
    2. Post to web site
j. Regulations effective _____/15. Target asap in 2015.

COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee/Council should provide guidance on timing for implementation of regulations for Regulatory Amendment 20 (Snowy Grouper).