



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Amendment 61

Evaluation of the Fishery Management Unit

April 2026

Background

Amendment 61 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 61) seeks to evaluate species managed under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) to better align the FMU with management obligations and mandates required under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). This amendment will potentially remove species from the FMU or designate appropriate species as ecosystem component (EC) species where full federal management measures are not necessary. This amendment is intended to reduce regulatory burden and free up capacity to dedicate to other species that need federal conservation and management. Through this amendment, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) will determine which species will:

- Remain regulated under full federal management measures where appropriate (e.g., annual catch limits (ACLs), accountability measures (AMs), or size limits),
- Be removed from the FMU and no longer be subject to federal measures, or
- Be designated as EC species, which would allow some federal measures to remain in place such as a permit and reporting requirements but there would be no management measures (e.g., no ACLs or AMs).

Additionally of note is that the Council has directed staff to develop a report of annual landings for all unmanaged species, including ecosystem component species, from the South Atlantic region. The intent of this report is to monitor landings of unmanaged species in the region and potentially proactively implement management if the need arises. The Council has provided additional guidance for the report to be modeled after a similar report provided to the Mid-

Atlantic Fishery Management Council¹. The first version of the South Atlantic Unmanaged Species Landings Report is expected to be available at the September or December 2026 Council meeting.

Potential amendment timeline

Timing	Council Action
✓December 2024	Council began to review species to include in AM 61
✓September 2025	Reviewed decision document and approved for scoping.
✓Fall 2025	Snapper Grouper AP review. Scoping conducted (online).
✓December 2025	Reviewed scoping comments and provided guidance on draft actions and alternatives.
✓March 2026	Reviewed requested information, draft purpose and need statements, and clarified species in the amendment.
April 2026	Snapper Grouper AP review.
June 2026	Review draft purpose and need statements and draft actions and alternatives.
September 2026	Review draft amendment and analyses, select initial preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings.
Fall 2026	Public hearings.
December 2026	Review public comment and approve all actions.
March 2027	Approve for Secretarial review.
Late 2027 or 2028	Regulation changes effective.

Objectives for this meeting (April 2026)

- Review provided information.
 - What’s new since the AP last discussed the amendment?
 - Refresher on previous AP recommendations.
- Provide updated or additional feedback and recommendations for the Council to consider when evaluating whether to remove the selected 14 species from federal management (either removal from the FMU or designated as EC species).

What’s new since the AP last discussed the amendment?

While initially 17 species were considered in Amendment 61, at the March 2026 meeting the Council narrowed the scope of the amendment to focus on 14 species. The Council also clarified which species may be considered for removal from the FMU and which may be considered for EC species designation or an alternative management approach. In doing so, the Council provided the following direction to staff:

SPECIES THAT MAY BE CONSIDERED FOR REMOVAL FROM THE FMU:

- BAR JACK

¹ Mid-Atlantic Unmanaged Landings Reports can be found at: <https://www.mafmc.org/unmanaged-landings-reports>.

- MISTY GROUPER
- SPADEFISH

SPECIES THAT MAY BE CONSIDERED FOR ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES DESIGNATION OR AN ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT APPROACH:

- OTHER PORGIES COMPLEX (PARTIAL OR TOTAL)
 - SCUP ONLY OPTION
- GRUNTS COMPLEX (PARTIAL OR TOTAL)
 - TOMTATE ONLY OPTION
 - MOVE WHITE GRUNT TO ITS OWN ACL OR SPECIES-SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT AND MOVE THE REST OF THE GRUNTS TO EC OR ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT.
- DEEPWATER COMPLEX
 - MISTY GROUPER (WITH OR WITHOUT)
- SPADEFISH

SPECIES THAT WILL NOT BE FURTHER CONSIDERED IN AM 61 (will continue to be managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP with no immediate management changes):

- CUBERA SNAPPER
- QUEEN SNAPPER
- BANDED RUDDERFISH

Species being considered for removal from federal management

The species being considered for evaluation of the need for federal conservation and management are listed with their sector annual catch limits (ACLs) in Table 1. Species that are part of a complex are listed with their complex sector ACLs as well. Species in each complex that are not being considered for further evaluation are shaded in gray and provided for context. Complexes are managed under a single, collective ACL for all species in the complex. Commercial and recreational ACLs for individual species within complexes are shown in italics to indicate expected distributions of catch within complexes at the time that the ACLs were set.

As additional background information, landings history and trip-level information for the species being considered for removal from federal management are provided in Appendix 1. The evaluation criteria that the Council will eventually need to work through for each species when determining whether the associated fishery is in need of federal management is provided in Appendix 2.

Table 1. Sector and total ACLs for Snapper Grouper species requested by the Council for further evaluation of the need for conservation and management*.

Complex/Species	Com ACL (lbs ww)	Rec ACL (CHTS lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Percent of Total Complex ACL
Atlantic Spadefish	150,552	661,926	812,478	-
Bar Jack	13,228	49,021	62,249	-
Deepwater Complex	131,268	38,628	169,896	-
Misty Grouper	<i>2,388</i>	<i>475</i>	<i>2,863</i>	<i>1.7%</i>

Sand Tilefish	1,770	6,213	7,983	4.7%
Blackfin Snapper	1,096	2,569	3,665	2.20%
Queen Snapper	8,756	710	9,466	5.60%
Yellowedge Grouper	50,464	5,132	55,596	32.7%
Silk Snapper	66,794	23,529	90,323	53.2%
Other Porgies Complex	36,348	106,914	143,262	-
Jolthead Porgy	1,571	36,315	37,886	26.4%
Knobbed Porgy	34,515	32,926	67,441	47.1%
Saucereye Porgy	0	3,606	3,606	2.5%
Scup	0	9,306	9,306	6.5%
Whitebone Porgy	262	24,762	25,024	17.5%
Grunts Complex	217,903	618,122	836,025	-
White Grunt	203,405	440,484	643,889	77.0%
Sailor's Choice	0	22,674	22,674	2.7%
Tomtate	0	92,670	92,670	11.1%
Margate	14,498	62,294	76,792	9.2%

* Species in each complex that are not being considered for further evaluation are shaded in gray and provided for context.

Advisory Panel Feedback

A summary of potential measures considered in Amendment 61 is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Potential measures that could be taken for removing species from the Snapper Grouper FMU or listing as EC species in the Snapper Grouper FMP.

Potential Measures	Description	Comments
Alternative 1 (No Action)	Leave species in the FMU and within existing complexes.	Species will continue to have ACLs, AMs, and other measures where appropriate.
Alternative 2	Remove species from the FMU and federal management altogether.	States would be able to implement measures that extend into federal waters if there is interest. The ability, mechanism, and desire to manage species would vary by state.
Alternative 3. Designate species as EC species		
Sub-Alternative 3a <i>EC + no regs</i>	Do not implement or retain regulations.	The Council has 5 EC species in the Snapper Grouper FMP with no associated regulations.
Sub-Alternative 3b <i>EC + permit and reporting req</i>	Retain existing commercial (SG 1 or SG 2) and for-hire permit and reporting requirements for designated EC species (logbooks and dealer reports).	No changes needed to current permit or reporting requirements.
Sub-Alternative 3c <i>EC + aggregate trip or bag limit</i>	Implement an aggregate trip or bag limit.	Would need to specify possession limits by sector. Limits would likely need to be relatively unrestrictive since the species would no longer be in need of federal conservation and management.

AP Feedback and Recommendations

At the October 2025 Snapper Grouper AP meeting, Council staff briefed the AP on the Council's considered changes to the Snapper Grouper FMU via Amendment 61. The AP provided the following feedback captured in Table 3 and in the comments below:

Table 3. SG AP consensus initial recommendation for species considered in Amendment 61.

Species	1) Status quo (maintain federal management)	2) Remove from FMP all together	3a) EC w/ no other measures	3b) EC + permit*	3c) EC + reporting*	No AP consensus at this time
Queen Snapper**	X					
Cubera Snapper**	X					
Jolthead Porgy	X					
Knobbed Porgy	X					
Saucereye Porgy	X					
Scup	X					
Whitebone Porgy	X					
Misty Grouper	X					
Blackfin Snapper	X					
Atlantic Spadefish				X	X	
Bar Jack				X	X	
Banded Rudderfish**				X	X	
Sand Tilefish				X	X	
White Grunt				X	X	
Tomtate				X	X	
Sailor's Choice				X	X	
Margate				X	X	

*It is likely that the permit and reporting requirements will be included in a single action or alternative since they are linked (by having the permit, the permit holder is required to report).

**These species are no longer considered in Amendment 61 as of March 2026.

Supporting comments for the consensus recommendation:

- Queen snapper is a target species in S. Florida and so is, cubera snapper, but to a lesser extent. Concern over removal from federal management.
 - Also concern over species identification issues with cubera snapper and mangrove snapper of a similar size.
 - Similarly, the AP felt the Council should decide on either retaining or removing all the porgies as a single unit because of identification issues across porgy species.
- For queen snapper, cubera snapper, and the porgies complex, there was concern over new directed commercial targeting of the species if they are removed from federal management and the potential for increased discarding of other co-occurring federally managed species.
 - Also noted that scup are an important species to the headboat fishery in Raleigh Bay, NC.
- Misty grouper are a long-lived species that likely benefit from management.
- Overall support for removing some species from federal management to streamline the FMP and allow for additional directed resources and initiatives geared towards key species in the FMU.

- Recommend maintaining existing data collection and permit requirements if listed as EC species.

Other AP non-consensus recommendations:

- Consider removing all 17 species from the FMP to allow for state management.
- Consider maintaining all of the deepwater complex (blackfin snapper, sand tilefish, misty grouper, queen snapper) as status quo. Concern over bycatch of other co-occurring federally managed species if removed from the FMU due to new targeted effort towards the unmanaged deepwater complex species.
- Spadefish could be removed from federal management and the FMU all together if states are willing to take on management. Do not want the species to be totally unmanaged due to a potential shift in effort towards them.
 - Spadefish are not commonly caught with other snapper grouper species. Typically need to use specialized techniques to target spadefish.

Other AP comments:

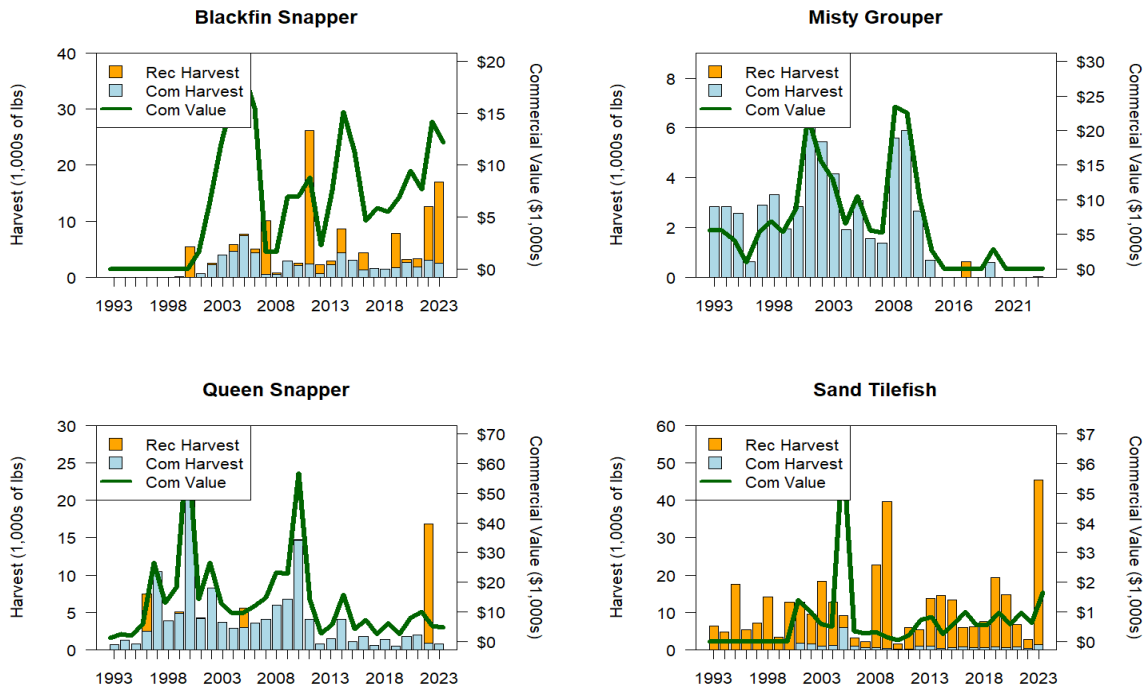
- White grunt is critical in North Carolina. The number 2 most common species in the headboat survey.
 - Don't want to see them overfished but also supportive of streamlining management of the Snapper Grouper FMP.
- Headboats in the FL Keys would benefit from having the grunts removed from the federal aggregate.
- Would like to keep the limited entry commercial permit requirement to avoid increase in effort and bycatch of other federal managed species that commonly co-occur with the proposed EC species.
- The AP did not have a recommendation on an aggregate limit for EC species and would like additional information at a future meeting before providing recommendations.
- After the AP's main discussion on the topic, an AP member mentioned that dealers sometimes lump blackfin snapper with yelloweye and vermilion snapper for sale because of their similar appearance, which could cause issues if blackfin snapper are removed from the FMU.

AP Discussion Questions: Gathering AP Insight

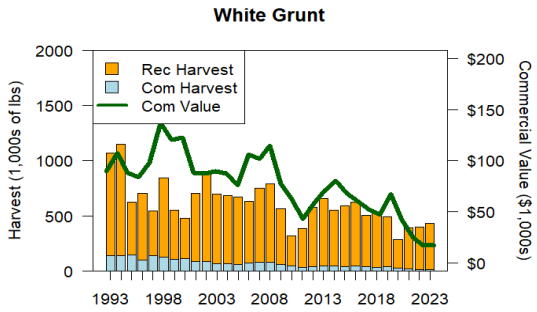
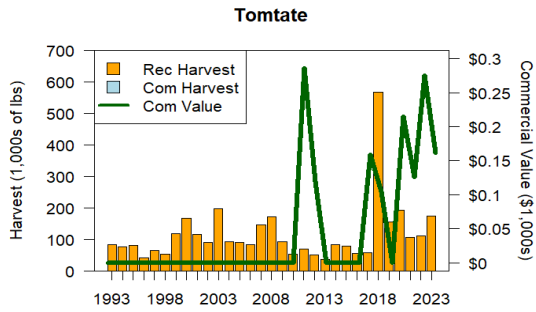
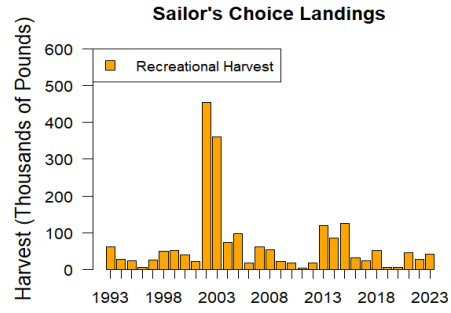
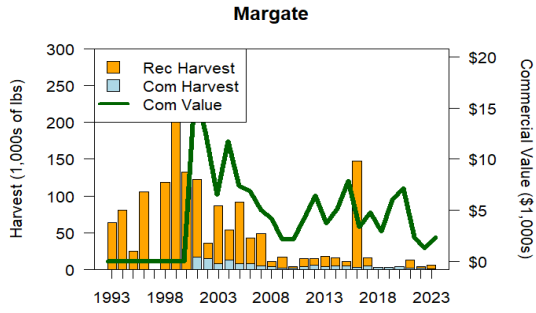
1. Does the AP have any changes or updates to the guidance provided in October 2025?
 - a. Does Table 3 still reflect the AP's consensus recommendations?
 - b. Any additional comments or items for the Council to consider as they develop Amendment 61?
2. The Council currently has 5 species that are designated EC species in the Snapper Grouper FMP (bank sea bass, cottonwick, longspine porgy, ocean triggerfish, and rock sea bass). Does the AP have thoughts on whether these species should also be included in the Council's consideration of a permit and reporting requirement for EC species? What about an aggregate commercial trip limit or recreational bag limit?

3. If the Council does pursue implementing an aggregate commercial trip limit or recreational bag limit for EC species, does the AP have a recommendation on an acceptable range to consider for those limits?
 - a. The Interdisciplinary Plan Team helping develop the amendment was considering suggesting the following ranges as an initial starting point:
 - i. 1,500 pounds, 3,000 pounds, or 4,500 pounds whole weight for an aggregate EC species commercial trip limit.
 - ii. 20 fish, 30 fish, or 40 fish per person for an aggregate EC species recreational bag limit.

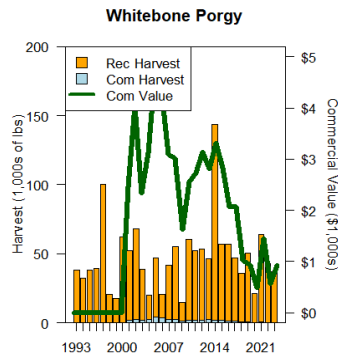
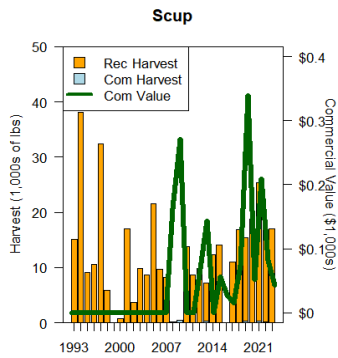
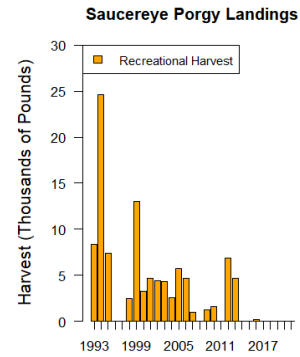
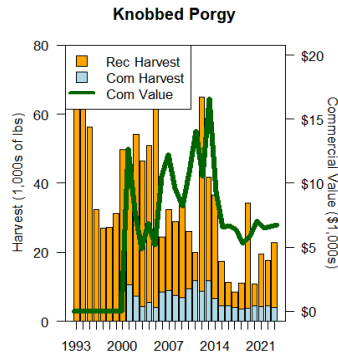
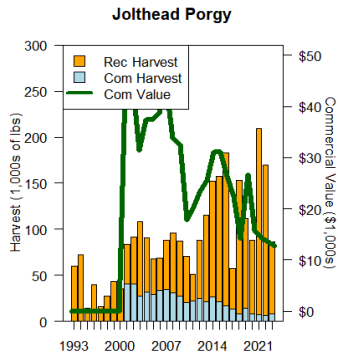
Appendix 1. Landings history and trip-level information for species considered in AM 61



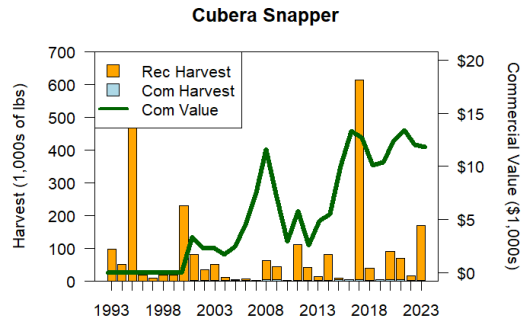
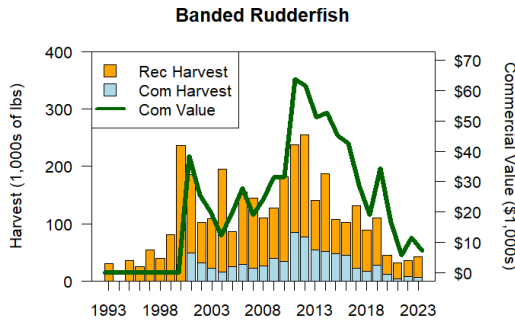
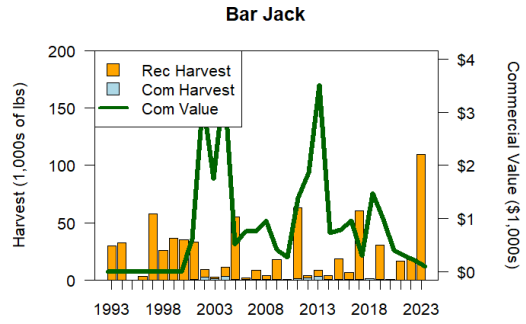
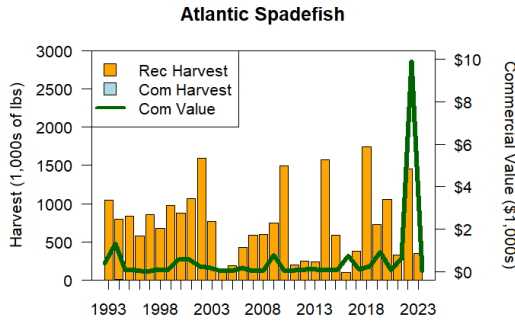
2019-2023 Averages	Blackfin Snapper	Misty Grouper	Queen Snapper	Sand Tilefish
% of FMU-Directed (Prim1, Prim2, Landed) Trips	0.07%	0%	0.07%	0.6%
% of All Commercial Trips with SG FMU Landings that Landed Species	1.26%	Conf	0.34%	0.99%
% Trip Revenue for Commercial Trips with at Least 1 Pound of Species Landed	1.7%	Conf	8.88%	0.24%



2019-2023 Averages	Margate	Sailor's Choice	Tomtate	White Grunt
% of FMU-Directed (Prim1, Prim2, Landed) Trips	0.36%	1.45%	2.24%	8.67%
% of All Commercial Trips with SG FMU Landings that Landed Species	2.45%	Conf	Conf	7.03%
% Trip Revenue for Commercial Trips with at Least 1 Pound of Species Landed	0.5%	Conf	Conf	1.52%



2019-2023 Averages	Jolthead Porgy	Knobbed Porgy	Saucereye Porgy	Scup	Whitebone Porgy
% of FMU-Directed (Prim1, Prim2, Landed) Trips	3.4%	0.66%	0.58%	0.16%	1.31%
% of All Commercial Trips with SG FMU Landings that Landed Species	4.27%	2.97%	0%	0.11%	0.54%
% Trip Revenue for Commercial Trips with at Least 1 Pound of Species Landed	1.2%	0.49%	0%	0.69%	0.63%



2019-2023 Averages	Atlantic Spadefish	Bar Jack	Banded Rudderfish	Cubera Snapper
% of FMU-Directed (Prim1, Prim2, Landed) Trips	4.92%	0.65%	0.1%	0.63%
% of All Commercial Trips with SG FMU Landings that Landed Species	0.26%	0.23%	2.59%	0.96%
% Trip Revenue for Commercial Trips with at Least 1 Pound of Species Landed	7.1%	1.03%	1.91%	3.72%

Appendix 2. Evaluation criteria for determining whether a fishery is in need of federal conservation and management

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) section 302(h)(1) requires that a council prepare a fishery management plan (FMP) for each fishery under its authority that requires conservation and management. Not every fishery requires federal management. Any stocks that are predominately caught in federal waters and are overfished or subject to overfishing, or likely to become overfished or subject to overfishing, are considered to require conservation and management (50 CFR § 600.305(c)(1)). Beyond such stocks, councils may determine that additional stocks require “conservation and management.” (see Magnuson-Stevens Act definition at 16 U.S.C. 1802(5)). Based on this definition, and other relevant provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, a council should consider the following non-exhaustive list of factors when deciding whether additional stocks require conservation and management:

- i. The stock is an important component of the marine environment.
- ii. The stock is caught by the fishery.
- iii. Whether an FMP can improve or maintain the condition of the stock.
- iv. The stock is a target of a fishery.
- v. The stock is important to commercial, recreational, or subsistence users.
- vi. The fishery is important to the Nation or to the regional economy.
- vii. The need to resolve competing interests and conflicts among user groups and whether an FMP can further that resolution.
- viii. The economic condition of a fishery and whether an FMP can produce more efficient utilization.
- ix. The needs of a developing fishery, and whether an FMP can foster orderly growth.
- x. The extent to which the fishery is already adequately managed by states, by state/federal programs, or by federal regulations pursuant to other FMPs or international commissions, or by industry self-regulation, consistent with the requirements of the MSA and other applicable law.

[50 CFR § 600.305\(c\)\(4\)](#): When considering removing a stock from, or continuing to include a stock in, an FMP, Councils should prepare a thorough analysis of factors in [paragraphs \(c\)\(1\)\(i\) through \(x\)](#) of this section, and any additional considerations that may be relevant to the particular stock. As mentioned in [paragraph \(c\)\(3\)](#) of this section, if the amount and/or type of catch that occurs in Federal waters is a significant contributing factor to the stock's status, such information would weigh heavily in favor of continuing to include a stock in an FMP. Councils should consider weighting the factors as follows. Factors in [paragraphs \(c\)\(1\)\(i\) through \(iii\)](#) of this section should be considered first, as they address maintaining a fishery resource and the marine environment. *See* [16 U.S.C. 1802\(5\)\(A\)](#). These factors weigh in favor of continuing to include a stock in an FMP. Councils should next consider factors in [paragraphs \(c\)\(1\)\(iv\) through \(ix\)](#) of this section, which set forth key economic, social, and other reasons contained within the MSA for an FMP action. *See* [16 U.S.C. 1802\(5\)\(B\)](#). Finally, a Council should consider the factor in [paragraph \(c\)\(1\)\(x\)](#) of this section before deciding to remove a stock from, or continue to include a stock in, an FMP. In many circumstances, adequate management of a fishery by states, state/Federal programs, or another Federal FMP would weigh in favor of removing a stock from an FMP. *See e.g.*, [16 U.S.C. 1851\(a\)\(7\)](#) and [1856\(a\)\(3\)](#).

Ecosystem Component Species

Ecosystem Component Species (see §§ 600.305(c)(5) and 600.310(d)(1)) are stocks that a Council or the Secretary has determined do not require conservation and management, but desire to list in an FMP in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives.

Stocks that are identified in an FMP but not in need of conservation and management (*i.e.*, EC species or stocks that the fishery interacts with but are managed primarily under another FMP, see § 600.305(c)(5) through (6)) do not require ACLs, other reference points, or accountability measures.