Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel
Red Grouper Fishery Performance Report
April 2017

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) is being asked to provide information to develop a fishery performance report (FPR) for Red Grouper. The purpose of the FPR is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPR format is based on the Mid-Atlantic Council's FPRs (available here: http://www.mafmc.org/fishery-performance-reports/). The FPR for Red Grouper is the first Snapper Grouper FPR for the South Atlantic, and will be provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP). The format of future FPRs may change based on input from the AP, SSC, SEP, and the South Atlantic Council.

Fishery Overview

Based on data through 2008, the SEDAR 19 (2010) stock assessment concluded that Red Grouper were overfished and overfishing was occurring. The 2008 fishing mortality rate was found to be about 35% higher than the fishing mortality rate that would produce maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The spawning stock biomass (SSB) in 2008 was found to be just below the level at which the stock is considered to be overfished (Minimum Stock Size Threshold). Hence, in 2011, the Council developed Amendment 24 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The amendment implemented new fishing levels based on results of SEDAR 19 (2010) and put in place a rebuilding plan[1] with the aim of ending overfishing and rebuilding the Red Grouper stock. An update to the SEDAR 19 (2010) assessment was just completed and will be reviewed by the SSC in April 2017. The South Atlantic Council will obtain the SSC's recommendations at their June 2017 meeting and move forward with any needed management changes.

To inform management decisions on the Red Grouper stock, the AP is asked to provide input on:

- Trends in catch levels and any recent changes
- Markets and economic information
- Appropriateness of exiting management measures
- Observations on environmental/ecological factors
- Other observations

The following general information on commercial and recreational landings trends and economics is being provided to elicit discussion and assist the AP in providing information to answer the specific questions that follow.

[1] Amendment 24 changed the definition of MSST so the red grouper stock is not considered overfished. Nonetheless, the Council adopted a rebuilding plan in the same amendment.

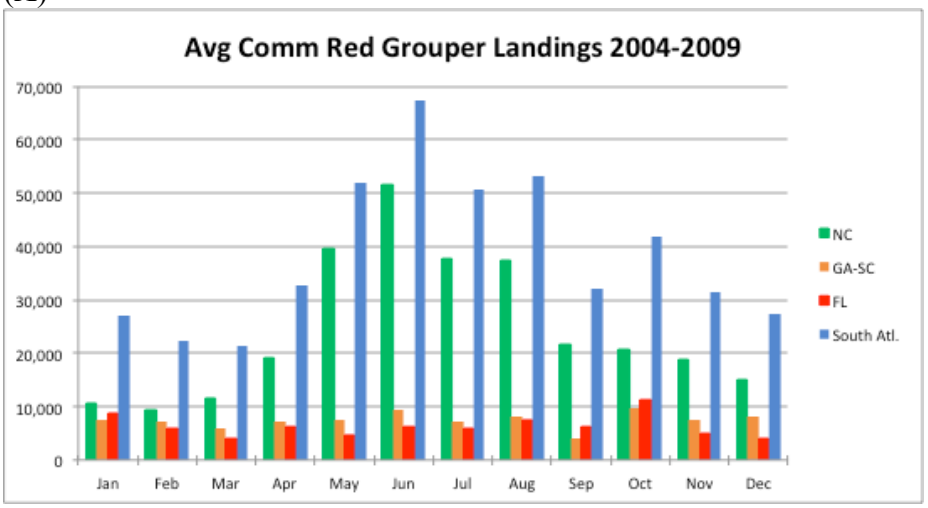
Commercial Sector

Figure 1 below shows average commercial landings from 2004 through 2009 (**A**), the period prior to the current Shallow Water Grouper closure, and from 2009 through 2015 (**B**). Average landings are presented by month and by state as well as for the entire South Atlantic region. For ease of comparison, the range of landings (y-axis) was kept the same for both figures. Landings for Georgia and South Carolina were aggregate to avoid data confidentiality issues.

Trends in annual commercial landings by month for the entire time series (2004 through 2015) are shown in **Figure 2**. The shallow water grouper closure was implemented in 2009, depicted in the figure by a break in the series.

Figure 3 shows price per pound in actual (not adjusted for inflation) dollars by state for Red Grouper from 2006 through 2015. The figure also shows the average price per pound for all three states in actual (not adjusted) dollars and adjusted dollars.

(A)



(B)

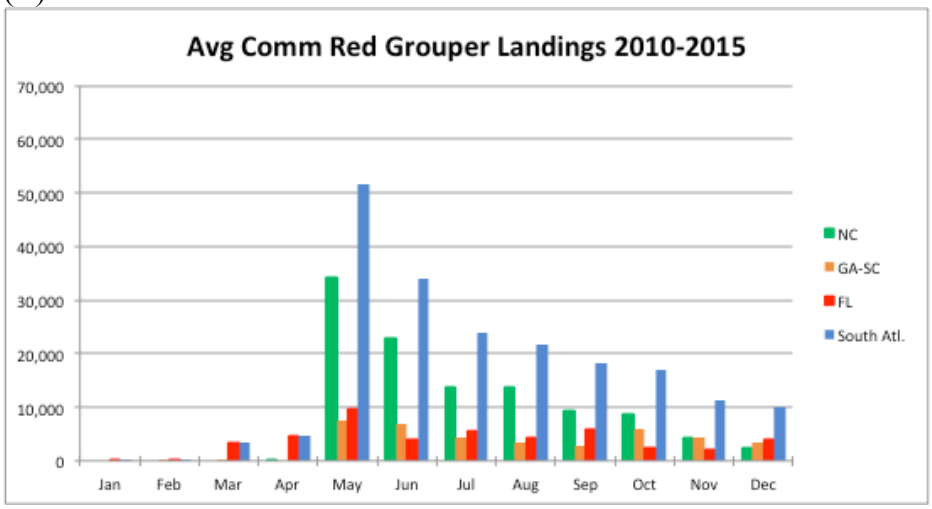


Figure 1. Average commercial landings (pounds whole weight; lbs ww) of **red grouper** by month and state for pre-closure (2004-2009) and post-closure (2010-2015) years.
Source: SAFMC based on SAFE data from SEFSC.

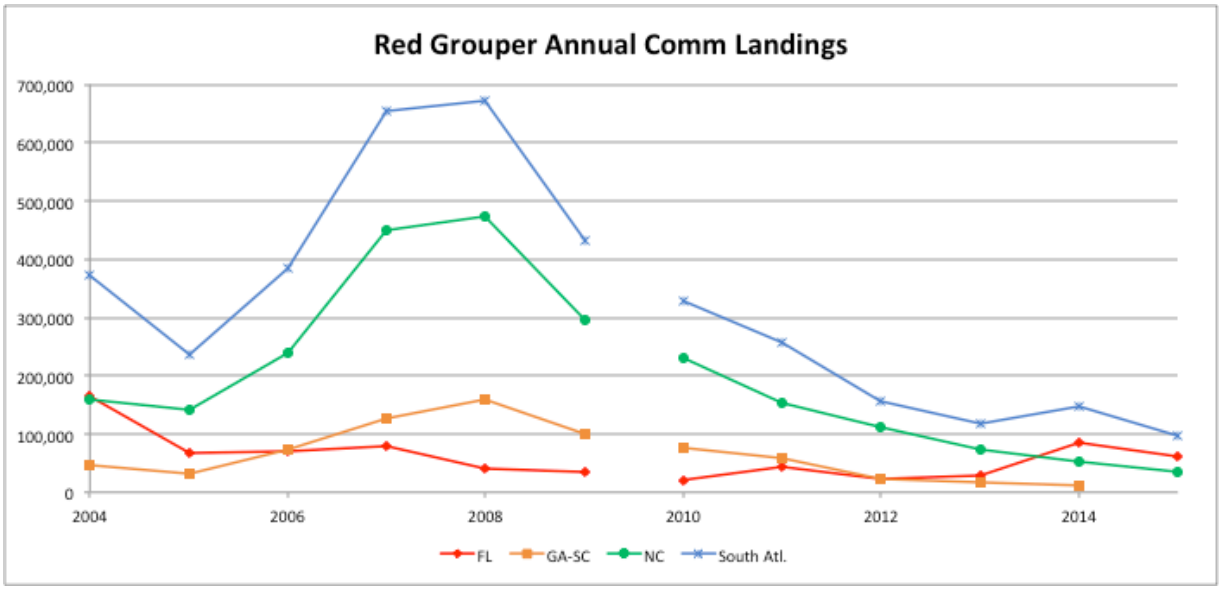


Figure 2. Annual commercial landings (lbs ww) of **red grouper** from 2014 through 2015
Source: SAFMC based on SAFE data from SEFSC.

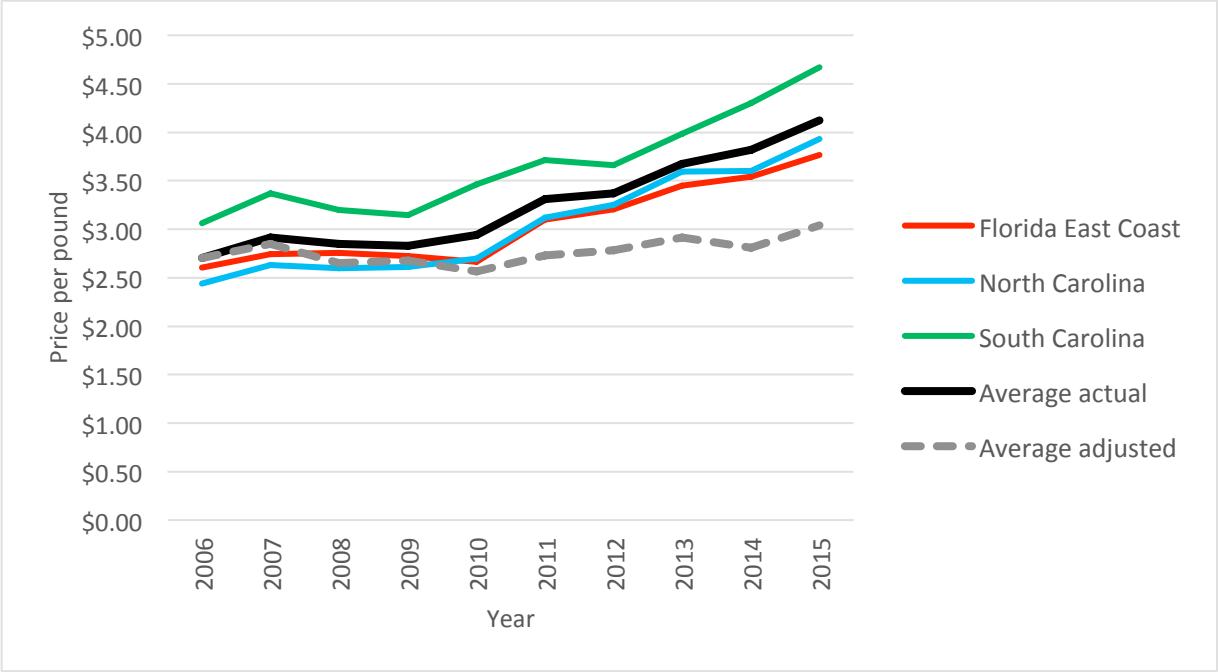
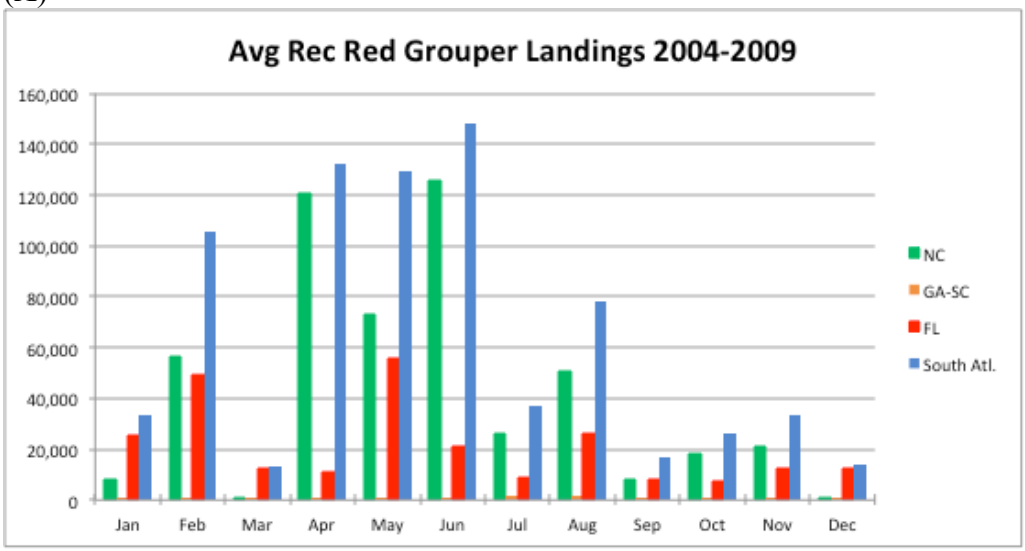


Figure 3. Price per pound (US$, not adjusted) by state for commercial red grouper, and actual (not adjusted) average price (black line) and adjusted average price (gray dotted line). Georgia is not included to maintain confidentiality.
Source: NMFS Commercial Statistics website.

Recreational Sector

Similarly, summarized information (**Figures 4 & 5**) is provided below for the recreational sector based on Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates.

(A)



(B)

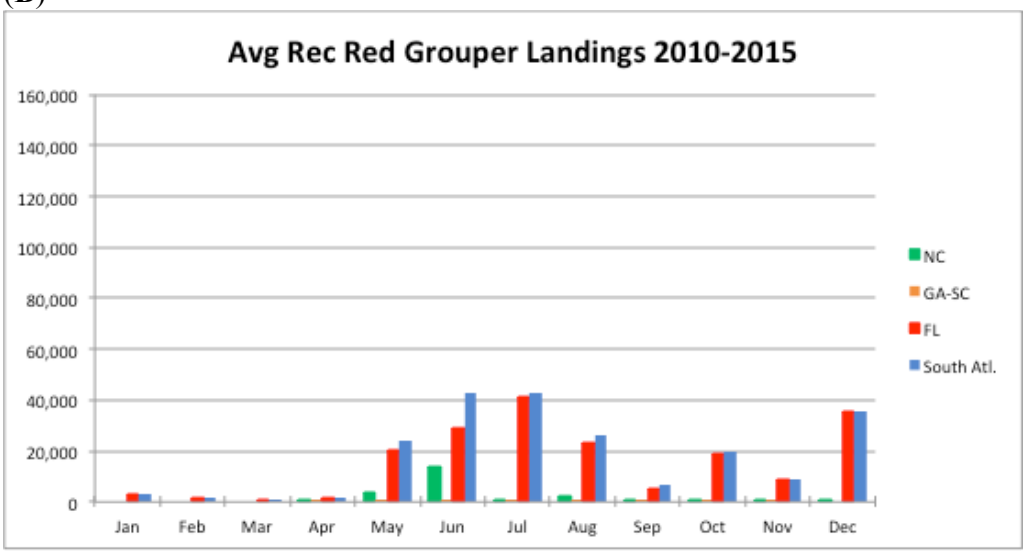


Figure 4. Average recreational landings (pounds whole weight; lbs ww) of **red grouper** by month and state for (**A**) pre-closure (2004-2009) and (**B**) post-closure (2010-2015) years. For easier comparison, the range of landings (y-axis) was kept the same for both figures.
Source: SAFMC based on MRIP data and average weights from the SEFSC.

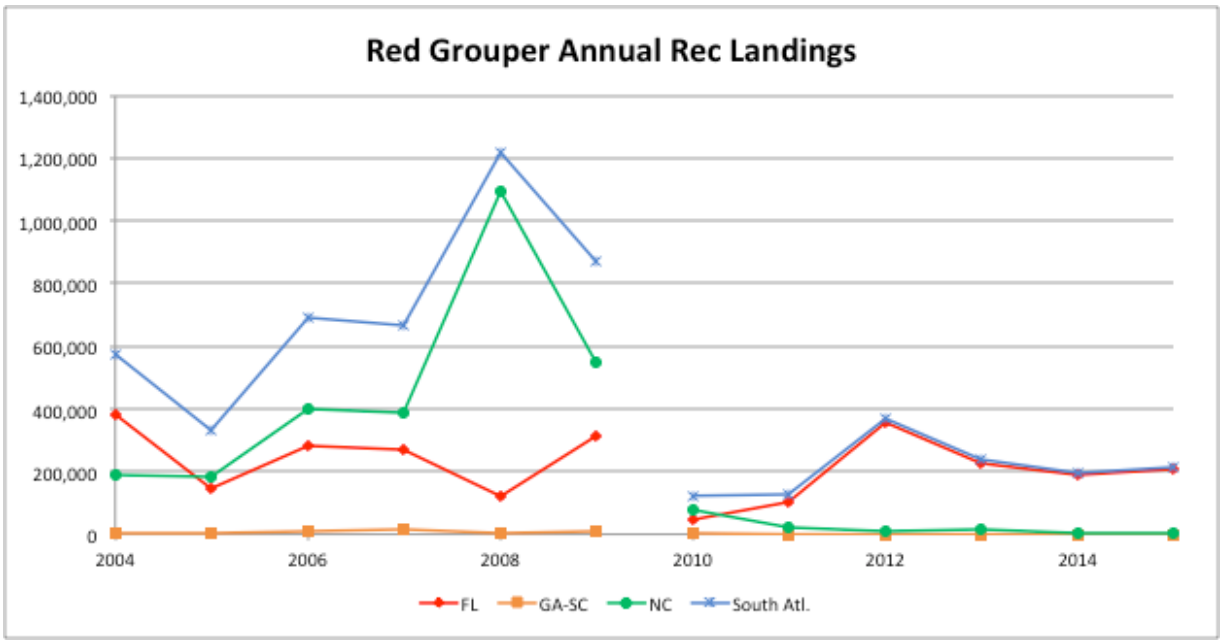


Figure 5. Annual recreational landings (lbs ww) of **red grouper** from 2014 through 2015 are shown below. The shallow water grouper closure was implemented in 2009, depicted in the figure by a break in the series.

Questions for Advisory Panel:

The AP is asked to provide the following information about Red Grouper based on their expertise, as appropriate:

1) Catch levels over the past 5 years:
- For the commercial sector, how has price and demand for red grouper changed?
- How has demand for charter/headboat trips targeting red grouper changed?
- When/where are the fish available, and has this changed?
- Has the size of the fish changed?
- Have there been effort shifts to/from red grouper?

2) Management measures:
- Is the 20-inch minimum size limit for the commercial sector appropriate?
- Is the 20-inch minimum size limit for the recreational sector appropriate?
- Are there new measures that the Council should consider?
- Are there other existing measures (i.e. 4-month closure) that should be changed?

3) Environmental/ecological
- Has there been a shift in red grouper abundance/availability due to environmental factors such as mild winter, storms, cold-water intrusions?
- The most recent assessment indicated that recruitment has been lower than expected since 2005. Are you observing low Red Grouper recruitment on the water? Can environmental or ecological drivers of recruitment be identified?
- Are there well-defined zoogeographic breaks (e.g., Florida keys, Cape Hatteras) that could inform stock structure?
- What are your observations concerning the timing and length of the red grouper spawning season in your area?

4) Other
- Do you have suggestions for research priorities for Red Grouper?
- What else is important for the Council to know about Red Grouper?