

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL



2016 - 2020

VISION BLUEPRINT for the Snapper Grouper Fishery in the South Atlantic



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ON THE COVER:

Black sea bass
Don DeMaria

Yellowtail snapper school
Don DeMaria

Scamp grouper
Don DeMaria

Introduction

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) **Vision Blueprint** for the snapper grouper fishery is the culmination of three years of the Council working with stakeholders to develop a long-term strategic plan for managing the fishery. This strategic plan, called the **Vision Blueprint**, represents the Council's first attempt at taking a pro-active approach to addressing issues within the current system of management for the snapper grouper fishery. At the urging of stakeholders, the Council began developing the plan through the Visioning project which included extensive stakeholder engagement throughout the region and across all sectors in the fishery. This stakeholder-driven process has served as the foundation of the project and forms the backbone of the Vision Blueprint.

The Vision Blueprint identifies the goals, objectives, strategies, and actions that support the Vision for the snapper grouper fishery. The Vision Blueprint centers around four goal areas - **Science, Management, Communication, and Governance** - that are necessary for looking ahead to how the snapper grouper fishery could be managed. Each goal has a set of specific objectives and strategies that describe components needed for achieving the overall goals. Actions listed under each strategy show the variety of tools that could be considered and implemented to accomplish the strategy.

How is the Vision Blueprint Organized?

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - 2014 Port Meetings

- 26 Meetings
- 4 States
- 362 stakeholders
- Participants - commercial, for-hire, recreational, seafood dealers, restaurant-owners, chefs, environmental groups
- Identified issues in the fishery
- Developed ideas for solutions to fix problems in the fishery
- Guided framework of the Vision Blueprint

The Council received additional public input in July and August 2015 that provided further insight into the types of actions stakeholders supported to manage the snapper grouper fishery. Based on this input, the Council prioritized the objectives, strategies, and actions for this inaugural version of the Vision Blueprint. Therefore, the actions shown in the four goal areas are items that will be considered for management of the snapper grouper fishery from 2016-2020.

The priority actions are organized into a proposed implementation timeline shown in **Appendix A**.

The complete list of objectives, strategies, and actions for each goal area and a glossary of terms can be found in **Appendix B**.

Additionally, items that the Council deemed did not have enough stakeholder support at this time can be found in **Appendix C** and will not be addressed during the 2016-2020 timeframe.







The Vision Blueprint will undergo periodic review and evaluation and the review plan can be found in **Appendix D**.

How will the Vision Blueprint be Applied?

The Council recognizes that some items in the Vision Blueprint will need to be accomplished through close cooperation and in collaboration with management partners and other agencies. The goals and objectives of the Vision Blueprint are closely connected with the mission of other management partners and can be used to support their efforts.

The Council's intent throughout the Visioning project was to identify several critical issues in the snapper grouper fishery and, with the help of stakeholders, identify solutions for resolving the issues. Now that the Vision Blueprint outlines these critical issues and stakeholders have weighed in on suggested solutions, the Council will consider developing amendments based on the priority objectives and actions in this document. The Council will continue engaging stakeholders in carrying out the Vision Blueprint by gathering input on any new amendments that are considered as a result of items in the Vision Blueprint. Any amendment that is proposed based on the ideas in the Vision Blueprint would go through the normal amendment development process of scoping and public hearings with ample opportunity for public input along the way. The Council encourages all stakeholders to remain involved and provide input on amendment ideas that may be developed from the Vision Blueprint in 2016-2017.

The Vision Blueprint

-  Serves as a "living document" to help guide future management of the snapper grouper fishery
-  Informs management of the snapper grouper fishery from 2016-2020
-  Builds upon stakeholder and Council member input on how the fishery could be managed in the future
-  Guides development of new amendments that address priority objectives and strategies
-  Illustrates actions that could be used for management and would be developed through the regular amendment process
-  Will be updated in 2020

Vision

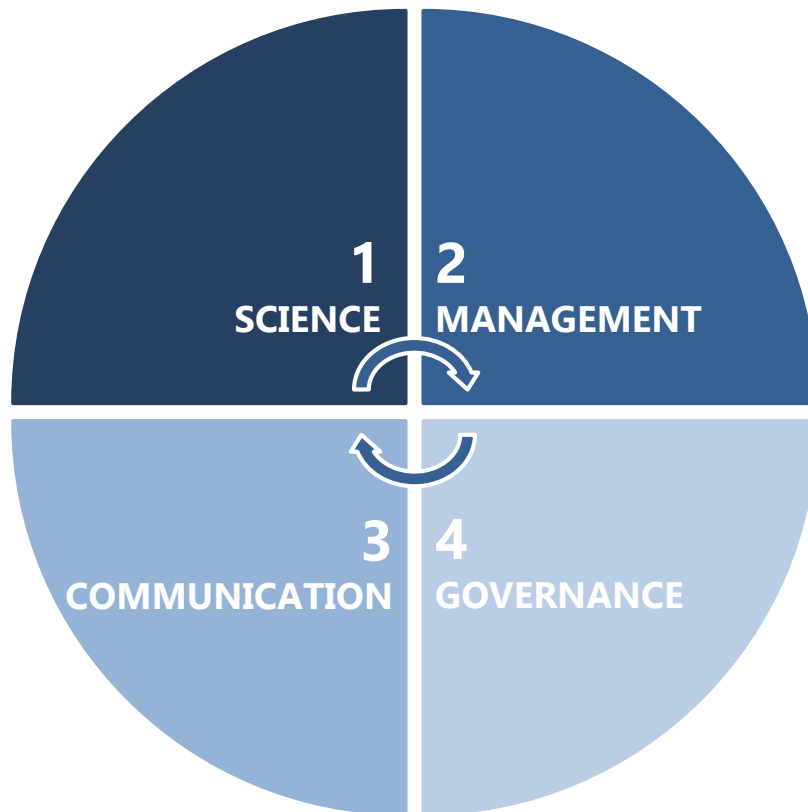
*The snapper grouper fishery is a healthy, sustainable fishery
that balances and optimizes benefits for all.*

Mission

The Council is responsible for the conservation and management of fish stocks within the federal 200-mile limit of the Atlantic off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida to Key West. Management is consistent with the National Standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The role of the council is to develop fishery management plans needed to manage fishery resources within federal waters.

Goals

The SAFMC Vision Blueprint is organized into four strategic goal areas:



Each goal area has a set of objectives, strategies, and actions. Those listed in this section are the objectives, strategies, and actions that the Council prioritized in 2015 based on stakeholder input. A complete list is included in Appendix B. The actions listed for each goal are examples of tactics that could be used to achieve the priority objectives but would be refined during the amendment development process. They are not inclusive of all future actions potentially needed to meet these objectives.

1 SCIENCE

GOAL 1

Management decisions for the snapper grouper fishery are based upon robust, defensible science that considers qualitative and quantitative data analyzed in a timely, clear, and transparent manner that builds stakeholder confidence.



Objective 1

Promote collection of quality data to support management plans and programs considered by the Council.

Strategy 1.1 - Evaluate existing data collection, monitoring, and reporting programs affecting fisheries managed by the Council.

Priority Actions

- *Evaluate fishery dependent and independent data programs.*
- *Evaluate SEDAR.*
- *Validate data collection programs.*
- *Identify sampling resources needed to support data programs.*

Strategy 1.2 - Encourage consistency in data collection programs that incorporates standardized methods, reporting requirements and formats across the South Atlantic region.

Priority Actions

- *Support efforts to create a uniform, efficient reporting mechanism for trip tickets and logbooks*

Strategy 1.3 - Support improvement and expansion of fishery independent programs.

Priority Actions

- *Identify alternative sources of funding to support expansion of fishery independent surveys*
- *Coordination and consistency in data collection with Mid-Atlantic for overlapping species management (fishery independent).*

Objective 2

Encourage development of mechanisms to effectively engage and collaborate with stakeholders on cooperative research, data collection and analysis.

Strategy 2.1 – Promote and expand opportunities for cooperative research and surveys in the South Atlantic region.

Priority Actions

- *Identify sources of funding (both traditional and non-traditional) for cooperative research and surveys.*
- *Improve partnerships between potential researchers and fishermen.*
- *Support partnerships to enhance habitat and ecosystem mapping in the region.*
- *Consider use of an industry research set-aside funding program to support fishery research and monitoring needs.*
- *Utilize fishing vessels and captains as alternative observer platforms.*

Strategy 2.2 - Support development of citizen science programs for data collection needs in the snapper grouper fishery.

Priority Actions

- *Support a volunteer angler training program to collect specific data to address a science or management need.*
- *Develop methods to incorporate volunteer data for use in stock assessments, and other management measures.*
- *Utilize fishing vessels and captains as alternative data collection platforms.*

Other “Hot Topic” Items

Additionally, the Council identified other important action items under the Science goal that may be useful tools to explore to address current issues in the snapper grouper fishery (refer to Appendix B for a complete list of Vision Blueprint objectives and strategies). These actions include,

- *Support data collection that considers economics when considering allocation strategies (Objective 3, Strategy 3.1)*
- *A recreational fishing stamp/permit/license for the snapper-grouper fishery (Objective 4, Strategy 4.2)*
- *Improve partnerships between potential researchers and fishermen (Objective 2, Strategy 2.1)*
- *Use fishing vessels and captains as alternative data collection platforms (Objective 2, Strategy 2.2)*
- *Evaluate broad, cumulative socio-economic impacts of proposed and existing management measures and alternatives to assess how management actions affect other fisheries (Objective 3, Strategy 3.1)*
- *Improvements to existing logbook programs (Objective 4, Strategy 4.2)*
- *Develop a model to improve discard rate estimates for all sectors (Objective 4, Strategy 4.2)*
- *Determine how habitats contribute to production of managed species and the distribution of different life stages (Objective 5, Strategy 5.1)*
- *Support efforts to create a uniform, efficient reporting mechanism for trip tickets and logbooks (Objective 1, Strategy 1.2)*
- *ID alternative sources of funding to support expansion of fishery independent surveys (Objective 1, Strategy 1.3)*
- *Work with management partners to secure long-term funding for MARMAP (Objective 1, Strategy 1.3)*
- *Coordinate consistency in data collection with Mid-Atlantic for overlapping species management (Objective 1, Strategy 1.3)*
- *Consider use of an industry research set-aside funding program to support fishery research and monitoring needs (Objective 2, Strategy 2.1)*
- *Consider development and use of appropriate alternative electronic monitoring methods (Objective 4, Strategy 4.1)*
- *Increase bycatch/discard reporting (Objective 4, Strategy 4.2)*
- *Evaluate expansion of geographic boundary of Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Unit as species spread (Objective 5, Strategy 5.3)*
- *Improve understanding of predator-prey interactions on S-G species (Objective 5, Strategy 5.3)*

2 MANAGEMENT

GOAL 2

Adopt management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery that rebuild and maintain fishery resources, adapt to regional differences in the fishery, and consider the social and economic needs of fishing communities.



Objective 1

Develop management measures that consider sub-regional differences and issues within the fishery.

Strategy 1.1 - Consider development of different types of quota-based management systems.

Priority Actions

- Consider species specific quota-based management (Examples, state-by-state commercial and/or recreational quotas (e.g., vermillion snapper, black sea bass, etc.); sub-regional management for deepwater species to include but not limited to snowy grouper, blueline tilefish and golden tilefish.)

Strategy 1.2 - - Identify the design elements needed for development of different types of quota-based management systems.

Priority Actions

- Consider different design elements for quota-based management systems (Examples, quota transfer by subregion; using average landings over a certain time period as a system design element; developing criteria by species.)
- Consider different management elements for quota-based management systems (Examples, allowing the sub-region (however defined) to set landings limits and/or openings/closures; managing sub-regions by effort.)
- Set management boundaries based on the biogeography of the fishery (i.e., species or categories).

Strategy 1.3 - Consider use of alternative sub-regional management strategies that are not quota-based.

Priority Actions

- Use staggered spawning season closures to address latitudinal differences in spawning activity.
- Set regulations based on designated sub-regions (areas/zones), not on quota allocations.
- Set state-by-state regulations for either sector.

- Apply sub-regional management strategies seasonally based on fish availability.

Objective 2

Develop innovative management measures that allow consistent access to the fishery for all sectors.

Strategy 2.1 – Support development of management approaches that address retention of snapper grouper species.

Priority Actions

- Consider bag limit and trip limit adjustments (Examples, Use a step-down approach when a species is approaching the ACL for either sector; Institute commercial trip limits and recreational bag limits for those snapper grouper species that do not have limits; Use a bag limit step down as a post-season accountability measure for the recreational sector.)
- Re-evaluate the grouper aggregate and manage based on area.
- Implement a charter boat limit instead of a per person limit on charter trips.*
- Consider alternative approaches to managing traditional multi-day SG bandit boats/fishery (e.g. permit stacking, multi-day trip endorsement, sector/community shares, etc.)
- Evaluate retention of recreational bag limit when commercial season closed.

*NOTE: These actions also apply to Objective 4 (reducing discards). See Appendix B.

Strategy 2.2 - Support development of management approaches that address the amount of effort in the snapper grouper fishery.

Priority Actions

- Consider a recreational stamp/license for the snapper grouper fishery.
- Evaluate the 2-for-1 permit requirement in the commercial sector.

Strategy 2.3 - Support development of management approaches that account for the seasonality of the snapper grouper fishery.

Priority Actions

- Consider a recreational season for harvest of deepwater species by region.
- Consider a “time-out” period of no fishing for the recreational fishery.
- Expand the use of split seasons for the commercial fishery.

Strategy 2.4 - Support development of management approaches that consider flexibility in setting Annual Catch Limits.

Priority Actions

- Use adaptive management for almaco jack and rudderfish to slowly increase the ACL.
- Use multi-year ACLs that use blocks of years to manage the ACL for a species (multi-year catch specifications).



Objective 3

Ensure that management decisions help maximize social and economic opportunity for all sectors.

Strategy 3.1 – Consider development of management approaches that assist fishery-dependent businesses to operate efficiently and profitably.

Priority Actions

- Consider predictability in for-hire business planning when making management decisions.
- Consider non-traditional stakeholders/ businesses when making management decisions (chefs, eco-tourism operators, bait/tackle shops, marinas)
- Consider diversity of harvest operations in the fishery when making management decisions (owner-operator, multiple vessels, etc.)
- Consider options to establish permit bank to address new entrants.

Strategy 3.2 - Consider development of management approaches that support recreational fishing and allow increased opportunity for trip satisfaction.

Priority Actions

- Consider effort control strategies (Examples, Setting fishing seasons with post-season adjustments for the following season.*; In-season/post-season bag limit adjustments instead of closures.*; Set fishing seasons for co-occurring species.*; Set bag limits that support participation (aggregate bag limits).*)
- Consider number of days allowed to fish vs. bag limits for the recreational sector.

- Consider an aggregate daily bag limit for the recreational sector.*

*NOTE: These actions also apply to Objective 2 (access to the fishery) and Objective 4 (reducing discards); See Appendix B.

Other “Hot Topic” Items

Additionally, the Council identified other important action items under the Management goal that may be useful tools to explore to address current issues in the snapper grouper fishery (refer to Appendix B for a complete list of Vision Blueprint objectives and strategies). These actions include,

- Manage effort/permits in the commercial and for-hire sectors (limited entry for for-hire) (Objective 2, Strategy 2.2)
- Consider measure to simplify regulations for both sectors (Objective 2, Strategy 2.5)
- Consider allocation shifts for species not reaching OY (Objective 6, Strategy 6.2)
- Consider species-specific quota-based management (Objective 1, Strategy 1.1)
- Set a fishing season at the beginning of the fishing year with known open and close dates (Objective 4, Strategy 4.1)
- Create new habitat using artificial reefs (Objective 5, Strategy 5.1)
- Adjust the seasonal spawning closure for shallow water grouper (Consider shortening by 1 month; allow fishing but reduce bag limit; or a rolling closure throughout the region (Objective 2, Strategy 2.3)
- Shift sector allocations in-season (Objective 2, Strategy 2.4)
- Promote opportunities for research, development, and evaluation of gear and technology to reduce bycatch (Objective 4, Strategy 4.4)
- Consider use of ACT to minimize discards in the commercial sector (Objective 4, Strategy 4.5)
- Evaluate the use of artificial reefs as a mechanism to improve fishery production (Objective 5, Strategy 5.1)
- Consider market availability when making management decisions (Objective 3, Strategy 3.1)
- Evaluate the level of overcapitalization in the fishery (carrying capacity) (Objective 2, Strategy 2.2)

3 COMMUNICATION

GOAL 3

Employ interactive outreach strategies that encourage continuous participation and support two-way engagement between managers and snapper grouper fishery stakeholders while building a greater understanding of science and management.



Objective 1

Develop communication approaches that provide streamlined and timely information to increase awareness and engage stakeholders.

Strategy 1.1 - Expand the use of innovative technology to improve stakeholder participation and to communicate the Council process.

Priority Actions

- Utilize remote listening stations for public hearings and educational meetings to increase participation from remote groups of stakeholders.
- Continue Q&A webinars with Council staff to discuss upcoming amendments for public hearings and scoping.
- Work with NOAA SERO to provide advance notification of ACL monitoring updates

Strategy 1.2 - Utilize the Council's website as a clearinghouse for easy to access information on Council news, regulations, fishery management plans, and management actions.

Priority Actions

- Incorporate a real-time calendar that displays current fishery closures for each sector.
- Create a separate page for educational resources/materials produced by the Council on various topics.
- Track website analytics on presentation downloads and other documents to evaluate effectiveness and access of materials on the website.
- Work with NOAA SERO to provide information on the Council's website about historical closure dates.

Strategy 1.3 - Consider use of alternative outreach approaches to further engage stakeholders in the management process.

Priority Actions

- Consider an advertising campaign highlighting Council activities and success stories.
- Support expansion of the Marine Resource Education Program SouthEast (MREP-SE) to other areas of the region.
- Support more informal port meetings for educational purposes on relevant fishery issues/topics to include current and upcoming management issues.
- Diversify the locations of in-person meetings (public hearings, scoping, etc.) to allow for one-on-one interaction with Council members.
- Expand the Council's social media efforts to include use of YouTube and a blog.

Objective 2

Improve awareness and understanding of fishery science and research and how these inform management.

Strategy 2.1 – Support collaboration with academic and research institutions, non-governmental organizations and agency partners on development of fishery-related outreach programs and materials.

Priority Actions

- Develop recreational angler education programs about how to reduce discards (i.e., barotrauma, best fishing practices for handling/releasing fish, descending devices, etc.).
- Consider outreach strategies related to the connections between habitat and fisheries.

Strategy 2.2 - - Support outreach programs that address the process of a stock assessment and how results are used in management.

Priority Actions

- Develop targeted outreach programs aimed at all sectors about the Council process, including the role of the Scientific & Statistical Committee.

- *Develop angler education programs about fisheries science, stock assessments and data collection.*
- *Expand the use of educational webinars to convey information about stock assessments, data collection, and other fishery science concepts.*
- *Develop training for new SAFMC Advisory Panel members.*
- *Continue Council support of the Marine Resource Education Program South East.*

Other “Hot Topic” Items

Additionally, the Council identified other important action items under the Communication goal that may be useful tools to explore to address current issues in the snapper grouper fishery (refer to Appendix B for a complete list of Vision Blueprint objectives and strategies). These actions include,

- *Develop recreational angler education programs about how to reduce discards (i.e. baurotrauma, best fishing practices for handling/releasing fish, descending devices, etc.) (Objective 2; Strategy 2.1)*
- *Support more informal port meetings for educational purposes on relevant fishery issues/topics to include current and upcoming management issues (Objective 1, Strategy 1.3)*
- *Support expansion of the MREP SE to other areas of the region (Objective 1, Strategy 1.3)*
- *Continue Council support of MREP southeast (Objective 2, Strategy 2.2)*
- *Utilize remote listening stations for public hearings and educational meetings to increase participation from remote groups of stakeholders (Objective 1, Strategy 1.1)*
- *Work with NOAA/SERO to provide information about historical closure dates (Objective 1, Strategy 1.2)*
- *Consider use of direct mailings/other communication strategies targeting SG permit holders for significant management/regulatory actions (Objective 3, Strategy 3.1)*
- *Provide informational resources to fishermen about marketing of alternative/under-utilized species (Objective 4, Strategy 4.1)*
- *Utilize web-based tools (webinars, video conferencing, etc.) and other technology to collect public comment and provide educational workshops (Objective 1, Strategy 1.1)*
- *Consider an advertising campaign highlighting*

Council activities and success stories (Objective 1, Strategy 1.3)

- *Consider use of informal polls/surveys to take input on a specific management action or direction being considered by the Council (before Council starts to develop action) (Objective 1, Strategy 1.3)*
- *Develop and maintain a database of SG fishery related contacts for use in communication and outreach programs to include: recreational fishing focused groups (fishing clubs, bait and tackle shops, dive shops, etc.), seafood dealers/retailers, and other commercial fishing businesses (Objective 3, Strategy 3.1)*
- *Develop one page fishery management resources (print and electronic) for distribution to targeted audiences/sectors (Objective 3, Strategy 3.1)*
- *Consider use of appropriate outreach materials that meet the needs of a wide generational range of stakeholders (Objective 3, Strategy 3.1)*
- *Expand the use of educational webinars to convey information about stock assessments, data collection, and other fishery science concepts (Objective 2, Strategy 2.2)*
- *Training for new AP members (Objective 2, Strategy 2.2)*

4 GOVERNANCE

GOAL 4

Commit to a transparent, balanced, and timely decision-making process that allows flexible yet well-defined protocols and strategies for managing the snapper grouper fishery.



Objective 1

Create an accountable and flexible decision making process for development and evaluation of management measures.

Strategy 1.1 - Support an efficient decision making process for development of management measures for the snapper grouper fishery.

Priority Actions

- *Consider mechanisms for streamlining the process of amendment development.*
- *Consider alternative methods for collecting public input on proposed management actions.*
- *Develop mechanisms for evaluating the decision making process to ensure consistency and accountability.*
- *Consider how scientific information is incorporated into management actions and provide flexibility in this process.*
- *Consider development of a regulations evaluation process.*

Objective 2

Build capacity to streamline management efforts and better coordinate with management partners.

Strategy 2.1 – Enhance existing and develop new partnerships with agencies, academic institutions, and other organizations to support comprehensive management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery.

Priority Actions

- *Establish working relationships with non-fishery entities and agencies (offshore energy development, etc.) for future marine management issues.*
- *Strengthen relationships with existing fishery management partners to clearly establish roles and responsibilities.*
- *Consider involvement with regional planning initiatives affecting the snapper grouper fishery in the region.*
- *Expand partnerships with academic and research institutions to coordinate fisheries science research to address data needs within the snapper grouper fishery.*
- *Identify non-traditional partnerships and sources of funding to support fisheries science, research and management activities (industry, NGO supported, etc.)*

Other “Hot Topic” Items




Additionally, the Council identified other important action items under the Governance goal that may be useful tools to explore to address current issues in the snapper grouper fishery (refer to Appendix B for a complete list of Vision Blueprint objectives and strategies). These actions include,

- *Develop mechanisms for evaluating the decision making process to ensure consistency and accountability (Objective 1, Strategy 1.1)*
- *Expand partnerships with academic and research institutions to coordinate fisheries science research to address data needs within the snapper grouper fishery (Objective 2, Strategy 2.1)*
- *Consider a development of regulations evaluation process (Objective 1, Strategy 1.1)*
- *Consider mechanisms for streamlining the process of amendment development (Objective 1, Strategy 1.1)*
- *Provide information to stakeholders that is timely and in an appropriate format about proposed management actions. (Objective 3, Strategy 3.1)*
- *Consider how scientific information is incorporated into management actions and provide flexibility in this process (Objective 2, Strategy 2.1)*
- *Strengthen relationships with existing fishery management partners to clearly establish roles and responsibilities (Objective 2, Strategy 2.1)*
- *Consider alternative methods for collecting public input on proposed management actions (Objective 1, Strategy 1.1)*
- *Consider involvement with regional planning initiatives affecting the snapper grouper fishery in the region (Objective 2, Strategy 2.1)*

Putting the Vision Blueprint Into Action

As noted previously, the Council will consider developing amendments based on the priority objectives and actions in this document. To see a complete list of objectives, strategies, and action items for each of the four goal areas, reference Appendix B. The Council recognizes the dynamic nature of the snapper grouper fishery which is influenced by many economic, environmental, and biological conditions. With this in mind, the Council will use the Vision Blueprint as a “living” document that will allow some flexibility when responding to fishery issues. The scope of the Vision Blueprint is broad by nature to ensure that the Council has a full suite of options to guide future management of the snapper grouper fishery.

Moving forward, the Council will evaluate current and future amendments to make sure the management goals and objectives align with the guiding strategies and actions of the Vision Blueprint. Additionally, the Council may use the priority objectives and strategies to develop new amendments using several different approaches. Examples of approaches include,

-  *An amendment focused on one or more of the “Hot Topic” items from the Management goal area.*
-  *An amendment focused on one priority objective from the Management goal area - sub-regional differences, maximizing social and economic opportunity, and access to the fishery.*
-  *An amendment focused on several priority objectives from the Management goal area that pulls actions from one or more priority objectives. Amendments developed using this approach could be sector-specific, focusing on one sector only.*

The Council will continue to work with stakeholders and management partners to implement and modify the Vision Blueprint as the needs of the fishery evolve over time. Stay involved in the process and look for additional information about Vision Blueprint amendments being developed in 2016-2017.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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PHOTO CREDITS:

Page 5 - Red snapper sampling
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Page 7 - Scamp grouper over reef
Greg McFall, Grays Reef NMS

Page 9 - 2014 Port meeting, Titusville, FL
SAFMC staff

Page 11 - SAFMC Council meeting table
Jeff Weakley, Florida Sportsman

