

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
December 9-11, 2025

The Committee approved the minutes from the September 2025 meeting and the agenda for the December 2025 meeting. The Committee received updates from SERO on the following amendments that have been submitted to NOAA Fisheries: Regulatory Amendment 36 (Gag and Black Grouper vessel limits and Black Sea Bass on-demand gear), Amendment 48 (Wreckfish), Amendment 54 (Commercial E-Logbook), and Amendment 55 (Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper).

Black Sea Bass EFP

The Committee received a brief from the SERO on an application for an Exempted Fishing Permit titled “Project to Modernize Pot Fishing for the Southeast Commercial Black Sea Bass Pot Portion of the Snapper-Grouper Fishery using Subsea Buoy Retrieval Systems” by Kim Sawicki. The proposed project would be completed in 3 years. This is the third application submitted to further research on subsea buoy retrieval systems in the South Atlantic. The project’s purpose is to test different on-demand systems and address damage caused by sharks as well as explore socioeconomic feasibility of this gear type. One of the requested exemptions is fishing in the closed area. The Council expressed concern over the requested take of black sea bass given the upcoming reductions in harvest for that portion of the snapper grouper fishery. The Council requested clarification on how much black sea bass has been caught in previous EFPs and the number of participants. It was clarified that fishermen who participate do so voluntarily and are provided no stipends.

The comment period will start when it is noticed in the *Federal Register* and last for 30 days. Staff will develop a letter stating the Council’s comments.

- The applicant is reducing the amount of bsb requested to 20,000 annually spread across the vessels listed on the EFP. Council is still concerned about this proposed take since it is about half of the allowable catch level that will soon be implemented.
- The applicant provided the requested information regarding landing of bsb in previous studies. The information was provided via email and distributed to Council members.
- Concern regarding the lowered ACT (48,000 lbs) that will soon be implemented through Regulatory Amendment 37.
- Work and research that have been done through this EFP is important and has been valuable. However, the timing of the application is concerning when the Council is looking at substantial reductions in allowable catch. Also, EFP participants would be allowed to fish in an area that is not available to other fishermen.
- Uncertainty as to how Regulatory Amendment 36 (which is still undergoing rulemaking) would affect this proposed study. The amendment clarified transit provisions for on-demand gear.
- Need further clarification on which landings are under an EFP.
- Council generally expresses their support.

South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Project Update

Chip Collier gave an overview of the research study clarifying that results have not been finalized. In January 2026, there will be a review of the project’s methods and results by individuals appointed by the Center for Independent Experts (CIE) prior to incorporation in management. After reviews, the findings of the project will be reviewed for incorporation into the ongoing SEDAR 90 (Red Snapper) Assessment. The SSC is scheduled to review SEDAR 90 in October 2026 followed by a presentation to the Council in

December 2026. The Committee asked if reviewers had been appointed by the CIE, but the list has not been provided to Council staff.

Commercial Sub-Committee Report and Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency)

Refer to the Sub-Committee report. Additionally, the Committee directed the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) to explore multiple options for procedural implementation of dynamic trip limits, including providing some bounds within which the Regional Administrator could have flexible authority to adjust trip limits as needed. The Committee also directed staff to remove vessel monitoring systems from consideration in implementing the gear stowage action and to develop that action only for vessels that have a valid directed shark permit or golden tilefish longline endorsement.

Snapper Grouper Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report

Chip Collier presented the draft SAFE report to the Committee highlighting the information included. The Committee requested that Georgia be grouped with South Carolina and that a figure be added showing landings relative to the sector annual catch limit (ACL). NOAA Fisheries requested consideration of adding ecosystem-related information and asked that their staff be given an opportunity to review the report. The final SAFE report will be posted on the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan webpage and the regulations webpage.

Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permits

FWC 2024 Atlantic Red Snapper EFP Project Year 1 Results

Jessica McCawley delivered a presentation on results of year 1 of the ongoing projects that are part of the 2024 EFP application. The main take-aways of the first year of these projects are listed below:

- Strong cross- agency coordination and cooperation
- 15-fish snapper grouper aggregate is too large
- Anglers content with being able to hit their red snapper limit and stop bottom fishing
- Discards are reduced; turning discards into harvest
- Effort varies by season
- Anglers support reporting data to FWC
- Participation increased angler satisfaction
- Positive feedback with high interest

States' EFPs addressing management of recreational red snapper

Andy Strelcheck introduced Annie Hawkins, NOAA Chief of Strategy. Ms. Hawkins addressed the Council regarding the proposed state management EFPs and expressed optimism about the future of red snapper recreational fishery management. The Council has full support from the agency in exploring better ways to manage recreational red snapper in the South Atlantic.

Representatives from each of the South Atlantic states presented each of their EFP applications that were submitted on November 10, 2025 to explore state management of the recreational red snapper fishery.

- During the discussion, Council members expressed concern as to how the proposed level of red snapper harvest and increased recreational effort will impact the commercial ACL. The expectation is that *directed* recreational effort will change, but overall effort will be spread out over the length of open seasons. However, not all Council members were in agreement regarding this expectation.

Specific comments submitted by Council members are in Appendix 1. These will be used to help develop the Council's letters for these EFPs.

NOAA Fisheries is reviewing the EFPs currently and there is potential that the public comment period could overlap with the March 2026 Council meeting. States and SERO will coordinate on how the EFP process moves forward.

Black Sea Bass (Regulatory Amendment 37)

Chris Kimrey, Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Chair, presented the AP's comments and recommendations related to Regulatory Amendment 37. Council staff presented the amendment actions, alternatives, and draft rationale.

The Committee reviewed their preferred alternatives, noting that additional discussion may be necessary following the Wednesday public comment session and prior to consideration of final approval at Full Council. The Committee did express concern about adding language that would prohibit "fishing for" black sea bass, commenting that interpretation of this language could be subjective and problematic. NOAA Fisheries noted that if the Council prefers a No Action alternative, moving that action to the Considered but Rejected section of the amendment could speed the federal rulemaking process following submission.

MOTION 1: DE-SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 (2 FISH) AND SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4 (3 FISH) AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 3 (BAG LIMIT).

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Action 3. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass

Alternative 3. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 2 fish per person per day.

Preferred Alternative 4. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 3 fish per person per day.

MOTION 2: MOVE ACTION 4 (SIZE LIMIT) TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Action 4. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for South Atlantic black sea bass

MOTION 3: APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 37 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPE FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL (1 ABSENT)

Blueline Tilefish (Abbreviated Framework 5)

In September 2025, the Council initiated Abbreviated Framework 5 for blueline tilefish to implement the SSC recommended catch levels based on SEDAR 92. Chris Kimrey, Snapper Grouper AP Chair, presented the AP's comments and recommendations related to Abbreviated Framework 5. Council staff presented the amendment document, analysis, and draft rationale.

The SSC's recommended ABC was in total removals (i.e. inclusive of dead discards and landed catch). Staff reviewed an analysis of commercial and recreational discards used to remove overall discards from

the recommended ABC to determine a total ACL based on landings. The Committee expressed concerns about the uncertainty of available discard estimates, but ultimately felt the benefit to the fishery of quickly implementing the recommended ABC was greater than the potential benefits of waiting for a more prolonged process. The Committee still intends to work on a subsequent amendment that would include reevaluating jurisdictional apportionment percentages with the Mid-Atlantic Council, sector allocations, and discard estimates.

**MOTION 4: APPROVE ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK 5 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPER FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND REDEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL (1 ABSENT)**

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61)

The Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) currently consists of 55 species, many of which are unassessed or have low landings. The Council is considering changes to the species composition of the Snapper Grouper FMU through Amendment 61 to streamline ongoing management of the fishery. In doing so, the Council has selected 17 species to evaluate if there is a continued need for conservation and management. The Council has indicated that these species may be up for removal from the FMU altogether or designated as ecosystem component (EC) species.

The Committee reviewed comments received from the Snapper Grouper AP and during scoping. The Committee also provided input on draft ecosystem management objectives relevant to EC species, the number of species that will continue to be considered in the amendment, and measures to include in the amendment. In doing so, the Committee provided the following guidance:

- The draft ecosystem management objectives are acceptable as presented.
- It was noted that a report on commercial landings for unmanaged and EC species in the South Atlantic Region is being developed and will be provided to the Council at a meeting in the latter half of 2026 and annually thereafter.
- In discussion of the species and potential measures that will be further considered in the amendment, it was noted that additional information was needed. As such, direction to staff was provided on the nature of the information that the Committee would like to see at the next meeting.

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- AT THE MARCH 2026 MEETING, RECEIVE A PRESENTATION ON HOW THE MAFMC HAS DESIGNATED ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES AND IMPLEMENTED ASSOCIATED MEASURES. (COUNCIL STAFF TO REACH OUT TO MAFMC TO COMPILE INFORMATION)
 - ALSO CONSIDER HOW OTHER COUNCILS HAVE DESIGNATED ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES IN THEIR FMPS AND ASSOCIATED MEASURES.
- FURTHER EXAMINE PAST SAFMC ACTIONS REGARDING EC SPECIES AND REMOVAL OF SPECIES FROM THE FMU IN THE SG FMP.
- REQUEST INFORMATION FROM THE SEFSC ON WHAT A SIMPLIFIED APPROACH TO ASSESS SPECIES CONSIDERED IN AM 61 WOULD ENTAIL, INCLUDING THE TIMELINE AND STAFF CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT THESE ASSESSMENTS.
- PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE PATH FOR DESIGNATING ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES.

Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper (Amendment 44)

Joint Snapper Grouper Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55 is in response to SEDAR 79 for mutton snapper and SEDAR 96 for yellowtail snapper, where both assessments indicated that the stocks are not overfished or experiencing overfishing. The Council reviewed an updated decision document with actions that would establish the stock OFL and ABC and jurisdictional apportionment between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, establish regional ACLs, and modify South Atlantic sector allocations for each species. Staff also reviewed how the plan team intends to analyze landings from Monroe County, FL, as well as feedback from the SG AP and the Gulf Council. The Committee discussed the range of alternatives for the jurisdictional apportionment actions and used the Allocation Decision Tool to develop alternatives for the South Atlantic sector allocation actions.

The Committee made the following motion and gave the following direction to staff:

MOTION 5: APPROVE THE PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT FOR SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 44.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The *purpose* of these fishery management plan amendments is to revise the southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper stock overfishing limit, and stock acceptable biological catch, based on the results of the SEDAR 79 and SEDAR 96 stock assessments, respectively. The amendments would also revise the jurisdictional apportionment between the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils, the regional annual catch limits, and the South Atlantic sector allocations.

The *need* for these fishery management plan amendments is to update existing catch limits, jurisdictional apportionments of the ABCs, and South Atlantic sector allocations for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper to be consistent with the best scientific information available, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- Develop a preliminary set of alternatives for Actions 3 (South Atlantic sector allocations for mutton snapper) and 4 (South Atlantic sector allocations for yellowtail snapper).

Action 3. Modification of Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper sector allocations in the South Atlantic.

Alternative 1 (No Action): Retain the current commercial and recreational sector allocations as 17.02% and 82.98%, respectively, of the **current** total South Atlantic total annual catch limit for mutton snapper.

Alternative 2: Retain the current commercial and recreational sector allocations as 17.02% and 82.98%, respectively, of the **revised** total South Atlantic total annual catch limit for mutton snapper.

Alternative 3: Update the current allocation using $(0.5 \times \text{average landings from 2004-2023}) + (0.5 \times \text{average landings from 2021-2023})$.

Alternative 4: Update the current allocation formula using $(0.5 \times \text{average landings from 2014-2023}) + (0.5 \times \text{average landings from 2021-2023})$.

Alternative 5. Use a distribution method of allocation based on the most recent 3 years of average landings for both sectors.

Alternative 6. Use a distribution method of allocation based on the most recent 5 years of average landings for both sectors.

Action 4. Modification of Southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper sector allocations in the South Atlantic.

Alternative 1 (No Action): Retain the current commercial and recreational sector allocations as 52.56% and 47.44%, respectively, of the **current** total South Atlantic total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper.

Alternative 2: Retain the current commercial and recreational sector allocations as 52.56% and 47.44%, respectively, of the **revised** total South Atlantic total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper.

Alternative 3: Update the current allocation using $(0.5 \times \text{average landings from 2004-2023}) + (0.5 \times \text{average landings from 2021-2023})$.

Alternative 4: Update the current allocation formula using $(0.5 \times \text{average landings from 2014-2023}) + (0.5 \times \text{average landings from 2021-2023})$.

Alternative 5. Use a distribution method of allocation based on the most recent 3 years of average landings for both sectors.

Alternative 6. Use a distribution method of allocation based on the most recent 5 years of average landings for both sectors.

Management Strategy Evaluations

Staff provided updates on the Snapper Grouper and Wreckfish Management Strategy Evaluations. Both projects remain on schedule and continue to advance based on recommendations from the Council, SSC, and Advisory Panels.

Golden Tilefish

Chip Collier presented the results of the revised golden tilefish stock assessment (SEDAR 89). The assessment was revised when a discrepancy in the commercial landings was identified. The Committee discussed whether to reinitiate work on Abbreviated Framework 4 to adjust the golden tilefish ABC and ACL based on the SSC recommendation. During the discussion it was noted that the current total ACL is set to increase in 2026 but the newly recommended ABC is slightly below this level (~1,000 pounds). The Committee decided not to proceed with using Abbreviated Framework 4 to adjust catch levels, since the stock is not overfished and the adjustment to the annual catch limit would be minimal. Instead, the Committee passed the following motion:

MOTION 6: ADD UPDATING THE ABC AND ACL FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH IN A SNAPPER GROUPE FMP AMENDMENT BASED ON THE SSC RECOMMENDATION.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Advisory Panel Recommendations on Items not on the Agenda

The AP Chair presented two items not listed on the December 2025 agenda. These items were the application of commercial trip limits on sale of fish and a request that NOAA Fisheries have greater consistency in announcing closure dates for commercial species.

Innovative Management Approach for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

Council staff led the Committee through a brainstorming exercise to refine goalposts and principles that can guide and inform future discussions. The Committee intends to finalize these in March 2026. The revised document is in Appendix 2.

Other Business

Commercial Trip Limits on Sale

The Committee discussed the issue of commercial trip limits on sale. This issue will go to the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel in their next meeting (January 2026). Within this meeting, staff will request that the LE AP comment on suggestions for acceptable forms of evidence to denote that an attempt to

sell occurred and where there could be potential gaps in the system.

The Office of Law Enforcement's (OLE) representative also commented that for any change in the regulations concerning trip limits and sale, changing the regulation would also require change of prohibition.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 7: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Continue development of Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency) via subcommittee for Council approval for public hearings in June 2026.
- Prepare information for Council discussion of the headboat vessel limits to bring to the March Council meeting.
- Continue development of the Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation.
- Prepare and submit Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass) and Abbreviated Framework 5 (Blueline Tilefish) to the Secretary of Commerce.
- Develop a report of landings for unmanaged and ecosystem component species in the region with the intent that this report be updated and provided to the Council annually (in the second half of the year by Council and NMFS staff).
- Continue development of Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper), including a preliminary analysis.
- Continue development of Amendment 61 (Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision), including requested additional information and presentations, for review at the March 2026 meeting.
- Prepare list of topics for the Spring meeting of the Snapper Grouper AP to bring to the March 2026 meeting. (INCLUDE ON THE LIST OF TOPICS DISCUSSION OF CHANGING THE OPENING OF THE RECREATIONAL GOLDEN TILEFISH SEASON)
- Include time on the March 2026 agenda to finalize the SG Innovation Plan.
- Prepare a letter to send to NOAA Fisheries on the black sea bass EFP.
- Prepare a letter to send to NOAA Fisheries on the state management EFPs submitted by FL, GA, SC, and NC.
- Add updating the ABC and ACL for golden tilefish based on the SSC recommendation in a snapper grouper FMP amendment.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

APPENDIX 1
STATE EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT COMMENTS

Enforcement, compatibility and compliance considerations:

- Ensure trip declaration reporting apps used by the respective states to include a law enforcement view/access that both state and federal officers can view and see trip verification codes. An easily accessible reporting app will expedite boarding and compliance checks, so officers can quickly verify trip activity and allow vessels to resume activity (if verified trip numbers are presented). There is currently a federal for-hire SEFHIER enforcement reporting view and that may be used as a template.
- Specify that authorized anglers/vessels must launch and return vessels from each respective state. This is already specified in FL and SC EFPs, but not GA or NC.
- In general, attempt to have compatibility to the fullest extent possible between all EFPs, same bag limit, vessel limit, min size, same reporting requirements, etc.

Council member comments on EFPs:

- Concern that EFP catch levels do not cause the commercial sector to lose access to their quota and affect sector allocation. This also would protect access for the non-fishing public that depend on commercial landings.
- Consider whether EFPs are needed once the new assessment comes out; which may alleviate the concerns that brought about EFPs.
- If the EFPs involve adding dead discards back to the recreational landed catch, then the commercial sector should also get dead discards added to their catch landings so the sectors' allocations don't change. Commercial does not need to be part of the EFP but sector allocation should not change by giving one sector access to dead discards and not the other... Commercial has "paid in" to the dead discard pot even though commercial discards are lower than recreational.
- Pros:
 - Thank you to the states for their work on trying to tackle this problem
 - Thank you for coming up with gameplans that would help with stakeholder trust.
 - We appreciate states starting to work on state recreational data collection programs that has been important to the Council
 - Thank you states for working to test programs and seeing what may work prior to the Council working on/finalizing the Council Amendment to delegate management for the recreational sector to the states
 - The council looks forward to seeing the results of these EFPs like we saw the results of the Florida EFPs
- Overarching Comments:
 - The individual state EFP proposals were designed in partnership with each South Atlantic state agency, and the intent was to craft these EFPs as consistent as possible with each other; however, individual state's laws and resources required some aspects to be different.
 - These EFPs focus on using innovative management tools and thinking "outside the box" vs. staying in the status quo for this fishery, which is NOT working.
 - Presently, MRIP recreational data on catch, effort, and discards are unreliable for use in management and has created distrust with the public.
 - Additionally, evidence from the Gulf suggests that catch, effort, and discard rates are reduced as fishing seasons expand from a "derby" season.

- The foundation of these EFPs are to obtain accurate baseline data about recreational catch, effort, and discards outside the “derby” season.
 - Evidence suggests the Atlantic red snapper stock is healthier than it has been in decades, is not overfished or undergoing overfishing, is 20 years ahead of the rebuilding schedule, and potentially 2.7 times more abundant than previously estimated.
 - FWC believes that there is ample biological, ecological, social, and economic justification to allow for the below exemptions to support improved data collection and management of RS
 - FWC’s EFP complies with MSA because it allows “temporary, controlled research or testing of new fishing methods that would otherwise break current federal regulations”
 - This EFP is crucial for innovation, improving efficiency, and gathering data for management
 - This study would be reevaluated annually and can be adjusted based on the results
- Florida-specific EFP Comments:
 - FWC’s EFP will test Florida’s State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) monitoring efforts and a voluntary reporting application to get a better understanding of recreational catch, effort, and discards over a longer fishing season.
 - FWC’s intent would be to utilize catch, effort, and discard rates from the longer season to inform what future fishing seasons could look like (same model is used in the Gulf).
 - In order to quantify and reduce discards, FWC is building off the success and lessons learned from our three FWC Atlantic Red Snapper EFP Projects and testing an aggregate bag limit.
 - Private anglers and for-hire captains will be required to fish for a 10-fish snapper grouper aggregate bag limit (red snapper included) in order to minimize interaction with snapper grouper species and reduce discard mortality across the complex.
 - The expected outcome is a reduction in discards across many snapper grouper species, including red snapper.
 - FWC is well-equipped to test state management of the Atlantic recreational red snapper fishery because of our established, MRIP-certified State Reef Fish Survey, agency resources, and experience with state management of red snapper in the Gulf of America for the last 7 years.
 - While data collection of discards of both red snapper and other species in the complex will be conducted during the EFP window there is still no mechanism to study the amount of discards of red snapper by the private and for-hire fleets the other 54 weeks of the year.
 - The inequity of converting the dead discard portion of the ACL to landed fish for one sector while still holding the other sector to the original dead discard/landed fish proportioning.

APPENDIX 2
REVISED INNOVATION PLAN DOCUMENT

Innovation Discussion for December 2025 Council meeting

Jessica, Kerry, and John went through the results from the September meeting and put phrases in different categories and tried to reduce redundancy and resolve contradictory concepts.

Overarching goal – Refer to these goalposts and principles as future SG committee discussions occur and decisions are made.

Goal for December meeting – discuss the topics, clarify concepts, and make sure topics are in the right category. Decide if anything is missing.

Goal for March meeting – Have summarized list of Goalposts and Principles for final review. This final review would include items in the other categories too.

Summary of Goalposts

- Recreational OY is about access openings to harvest fish; ~~not poundage of fish harvested~~
 - When opportunity is presented (e.g. weather/life circumstances), want to be able to use that opportunity to harvest
 - Does species matter? Is it that “something” needs to be open or preference of species?
 - Variable, but many want “something”
 - Desire for openings for specific harvest
 - Year-round access to fishing
 - Where abundance and access meet; want good quality of opportunity to harvest
 - Optimum opportunity; not really “yield”
 - What are specific behavioral outcomes of regulations for recreational fishermen?
 - What does recreational satisfaction look like?
- Commercial OY is about providing ACCESS TO seafood FOR consumers
 - MSA: “greatest benefit to the nation”
 - “Truck drivers” to bring resource from ocean to consumers
 - Need prioritization of efficient harvest – maximum harvest with minimal effort
 - Access for all levels: harvester, dealer, markets/restaurants, consumers
- Regional and temporal management of fisheries to account for differences across Council region
 - Split-seasons can be used and designed to spread access throughout the region
 - Approaches that consider local seasons, particular times of year/holidays
- Consider holistic view of fishery (e.g., multi-species nature and regime shift)
 - Consider ecosystem view of fishery
- Maximize trip efficiencies for recreational and commercial
 - Spreading harvest out to be more predictable can be more economically efficient (avoid flooded markets, be able to shop around for better price)

- Split sectors for this item
 - Recreational may not apply here; efficiency of trip may not be economic
 - Value/worth is more in the experience
 - Efficiency - access to fish during seasons when better weather is more likely
 - Return on investment (bang for buck)
 - Not a dollar amount; return on involvement
 - Satisfaction
 - Some opposing objectives – maximizing satisfaction of specific trips may oppose season length/access
 - Intangible benefits for both sectors, especially recreational
- Optimize year-round access to all SG species for commercial and recreational
 - Optimize access
 - Consistent, year-round availability/access to seafood
 - Seasonal availability of specific species, but year-round availability of SG species in general
 - Restaurants are challenged in being able to find year-round local fish to fit menus
 - When opportunity is presented (e.g. weather/life circumstances), want to be able to use that opportunity to harvest
 - Year-round access to fishing (both sectors)
- Don't let perfection stop progress
 - Paralyzed into inaction by number of decisions
 - Science; sometimes need action as the science is currently
- Take more risks in making decisions
 - Do some things new
 - System sometimes feels too rigid to take risk
 - Limited amounts of available quota can work against flexibility or risk-taking
 - Some fear ability/inability to be able to pull back a 'risky' action
 - Learn from other Councils processes to try new management or move current management changes faster
 - Risk can be process improvements; 'unpopular' management decisions
- We will never have the perfect solution for everyone
 - Managing balance of expectations/tradeoffs among user groups
 - 'Nobody's really happy but everyone can live'
 - 'Unpopular' management decisions
 - Metric is an improvement in trust
- Focus on single species management isn't serving fishery well
 - Eco-based fishery management
 - 'Bucket rule' bottom fish limit then stop fishing to reduce recreational release mortality
 - Multi-species vs. Ecosystem based management

- Ways to manage co-occurring species
- Considerations about targeting one species will result in bycatch of others is an ecosystem-based approach
- Examples like CMOD to possibly integrate into South Atlantic management

Additional notes:

- Additional detail in Quota Monitoring could be useful to know information for these goalposts in real time
- Beginning to work on data gathering ahead of management discussions could facilitate decision-making

Summary of Principles to get to Goalposts

- Ensure local knowledge is factored into management decisions
- Council take more risks and try new things to achieve goal and in making management decisions
- Develop allocations based on total catch –
 - Discards are allocated before Total ACL is divided
 - Discard data is uncertain – need improvement in discard data to inform this discussion
 - May make challenges in achieving above goalposts listed above
 - Aspirational – want to get the data quality to be able to do this
- Be proactive
 - This is a broad term and may mean different things to different people. Clarification on what this means for our process so we can then consider how we can do it is desired.
 - Get ahead of an issue; don't wait for a stock assessment to react to
 - Also don't wait for the 'Cadillac' of assessments
 - Tools to be proactive: SAFE Report, SERFS report, interim analyses, ACL monitoring, more real-time detailed quota monitoring access
 - Red flags/indicators
 - Don't settle for status quo
 - Act on information we have not what we are hoping to get
- Minimize wasted fish
 - Discards into landings
 - Similar to recreational trip efficiency/satisfaction
 - Not fully utilizing the ACL

Economic

- Evaluate commercial portfolio fishing
 - Strengthen the value of our fisheries
 - Cadrin's student paper, ~2022-23; Staff paper by Kari Buck
 - Periodic evaluation

- Consider/Continue opportunities for new entrants for permitted fisheries and limited entry fisheries

Science and data collection

- Simplify science to meet management needs
 - Support interim assessments
 - More timely info needed on stock status
 - Stock assessments that match available data
 - Less reliance on traditional stock assessments
 - More trust/confidence in simpler stock assessments
 - More generalized rather than specified in assessment approaches
 - Possible procedures workshop
- Support and promote efforts to provide/obtain ecosystem and multi-species analyses for supporting catch recommendations and evaluating management alternatives.
- Use more cooperative research projects to get data
 - = more engagement with the stakeholders
 - More engagement with states
 - Citizen Science

Ideas for Process for SG committee and committee efficiency principles

- More communication and collaboration between states and NOAA outside the Council mtg
 - Sub-Committees for specialized issues
 - Agency to agency – EFPs give an opportunity
- Be more responsive and timely
 - Push for shorter timelines for actions
 - Make hard decisions faster
 - Optimize use of expedited procedures
 - Timely response to assessments
 - Make better use of our right to use informed judgement when presented with conflicting and incomplete information
- Get out of the rut (see above)
 - Be solution oriented
 - Get away from single species management
 - Be willing to test new and innovative ideas
 - Make difficult decisions when needed in alignment with fishery goals
- Maximize meeting time
 - Use subcommittees to tackle niche issues (e.g., wreckfish subcommittee),
 - this can save time and streamline the process
 - minimize informational presentations (*seems this is about Council as a whole too, not just SG committee*)
 - Use caution; consider the representation the Council has on other bodies

- “Safe word” to stop discussions
 - Call the question quicker
 - Words in a bowl for March Meeting
- Not just about Committee; whole Council meeting week
- Provide booklet of important info to council members that would include goalposts, principles, SEDAR schedule, workplan, types of Amendments, etc.
 - DONE

Responsibility to Stakeholders

- Understand our audience better
- Desire stakeholder and fishermen satisfaction
- Figure out how to keep fishermen engaged
- Improve confidence of stakeholders in process

Summary of ‘No Go’ statements and concepts

- Rather than a specific list of statements and concepts, encourage Council members to used tact and know that words matter
- Avoid broad, blaming/shaming statements, especially those directed at particular sectors, industries, or organizations

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
March 3-5, 2026

The Committee approved the minutes from the December 2025 meeting and the agenda for the March 2026 meeting. The Committee received updates from SERO on the following amendments that have been submitted to NOAA Fisheries: Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 (Blueline Tilefish), Regulatory Amendment 36 (Gag and Black Grouper vessel limits and Black Sea Bass on-demand gear), Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass Short-Term Management Measures), Amendment 48 (Wreckfish), Amendment 54 (Commercial E-Logbook), and Amendment 55 (Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper).

Exempted Fishing Permits

The Committee received a briefing from the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO) on an application for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) titled “Collection of American Red Snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) Broodstock for Marine Aquaculture Research and Hatchery Fingerling Production” by Cultimar Technologies, Inc. The proposed project would collect 200 red snapper from federal waters off Florida in 1-2 trips, each including 4 days of fishing and 5 days of transit, occurring between May 2026 and March 2027. These fish would be transported alive to be used as broodstock at a hatchery research facility in Puerto Rico. The broodstock would be used for fingerling production to develop aquaculture of red snapper in the United States. The Committee asked several questions related to reasoning for using South Atlantic red snapper, the rationale for 200 fish requested, and how any fish collected through this project would affect catch limits for the fishery.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: Prepare a letter in response to the EFP application, including:

- Should Florida’s EFP for state management be approved, the Governor has requested that the applicant **not** collect the fish during the same time period that Florida would be allowing harvest of red snapper.
- Express concern that collection for the EFP should not coincide with the opening of the commercial season for red snapper.

The Committee also discussed the red snapper state management EFP applications that have been submitted by each of the South Atlantic states. The Committee discussed how accountability measures would apply to red snapper caught through the EFPs, if approved. The Committee also discussed potential effects of these EFPs on the commercial sector, especially related to equity between the sectors. The Committee was reminded that the public comment period for the EFPs is open through March 10, 2026, and Council members can submit comments individually to NOAA Fisheries.

Commercial Sub-Committee Report and Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency)

The Commercial Sub-Committee met on March 2 and 3. The Sub-Committee received information from SERO staff on permits, trip limits, and potential establishment of a notification

system for gear changes to or from bottom longline gear during a fishing trip. The Sub-Committee reviewed and developed draft actions and alternatives and requested that Council and SERO staff work together outside of the meeting to develop some action and alternative language for review at Full Council. A description of the developing draft language is included in the Sub-Committee Report ([Appendix 1](#) of this report).

Amendment 60 was further discussed during Full Council, and the Sub-Committee Report was updated to reflect these discussions. The following motions concerning Amendment 60 were passed during Full Council:

MOTION 1: REMOVE GRAY TRIGGERFISH FROM ACTION 2 (TRIP LIMIT REVISION).

APPROVED BY COUNCIL (1 OPPOSED)

- The Council clarified that the species included for trip limit revisions in Action 2 do not need to be the same species that are considered for temporary adjustments to trip limits under Action 3. Lists of species for each action are in the Sub-Committee Report.

MOTION 2: REMOVE CONSIDERATION OF THE 3,000 LBS TRIP LIMIT FOR VERMILION SNAPPER (BOTH SEASONS)

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZ)

The Committee received a presentation on the five Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZs) created in 2017 where fishing for, harvest of, and/or possession of snapper grouper species is prohibited. Three of these SSMZs are natural sites with a sunset on regulations after 10 years, while two artificial-reef SSMZs did not have the sunset provision. The Council intended to use the 10-year period to gather additional information to determine whether the natural sites are functioning as effective spawning areas for the focal species listed in the System Management Plan for the SSMZs.

To support the evaluation of the SSMZs and other protected areas, the Council established the System Management Plan (SMP) Workgroup. The workgroup is in the process of finalizing an evaluation and conducting the review. Their report will be provided to the Council to consider extending regulations for the SSMZs or allowing the regulations to sunset. The Committee discussed concerns with fishing access, compliance and enforcement; the importance of the areas for spawning fish; and bycatch. The Committee approved a motion to initiate a framework amendment to remove or extend the sunset provision for the SSMZs.

MOTION 3: INITIATE A FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT TO CONSIDER A RANGE OF OPTIONS TO REMOVE SUNSET PROVISION OR EXTEND THE SUNSET PROVISION BY 10 TO 20 YEARS FOR THE SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Headboat Vessel Limits

The Council requested an analysis exploring per-angler-based bag limits for federally inspected and permitted headboats as an alternative to vessel-based bag limits for gag, black grouper,

scamp, yellowmouth grouper, and snowy grouper. The Committee received a recap of previous discussions and recommendations, including input from the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel. Staff also presented analyses examining changes in landings associated with shifting from a vessel-based limit to a limit of one fish per six anglers.

Committee discussion focused on whether possession limits based on the number of anglers on board could help reduce the negative impacts that vessel-based limits may have on the headboat component of the recreational sector. The Committee was concerned with including snowy grouper in the amendment and ultimately decided to remove that species due to low level of discards, low number of vessels reporting landings, and concerns about the stock. Following discussion, the Committee approved a motion to initiate a framework amendment to consider possession limits of one fish per six anglers on headboats for gag, black grouper, scamp, and yellowmouth grouper.

MOTION 4: INITIATE FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT TO ADJUST THE HEADBOAT LIMITS TO NUMBER OF FISH PER SIX PASSENGERS FOR GAG, BLACK GROUPE, SCAMP, AND YELLOWMOUTH GROUPE.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Allocation Review: Vermilion Snapper

At the December 2023 meeting, the Council approved their [Allocation Review Guidelines](#) and updated their [Allocation Review Trigger Policy](#). The guidelines specify how sector allocations for managed species will be reviewed and documented while the policy specifies when allocation reviews will occur. One of the criteria that the Council chose to trigger an allocation review is time-based, noting that each species should have its sector allocations reviewed at least once every seven years.

For this meeting, the Council reviewed the current sector allocations for vermilion snapper since the species have met the time-based review criterion. In accordance with the guidelines, a summary allocations report will be developed based on the Council's discussion and presented to the Council for approval at the June 2026 meeting. The Council offered the following comments and guidance:

- The Council noted that existing sector allocations for vermilion snapper are sufficient for the fishery.
 - Neither the commercial nor recreational sectors are fully landing their sector annual catch limits (ACLs) in recent years with no early closures, thus the current allocations are meeting the needs of the current fishery.
 - The existing recreational allocation is working well for both the private and for-hire components of the fishery.
 - It was noted that the current ACL for the recreational sector includes Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Coastal Household Telephone Survey estimates and revisions are currently underway to update landing estimates for the recreational sector. As such, revising sector allocations at this time and without a new stock assessment would be problematic.
 - The Innovation Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery and Snapper Grouper Amendment 60 (Commercial SG1 Permit and Trip Efficiency) are being

developed and may help guide the Council's future allocation decisions once implemented.

- Sector allocations for vermilion snapper should be revisited when the next stock assessment for the species has been completed and recreational landings from the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey (FES) are integrated into the catch level recommendations.

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61)

The Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) currently consists of 55 species, many of which are unassessed or have low landings. The Council is considering changes to the species composition of the Snapper Grouper FMU through Amendment 61 to streamline management of the fishery. In doing so, the Council has selected 17 species to evaluate whether they continue to need conservation and management under a federal plan. The Council has indicated that these species could be removed from the FMU altogether or could be designated as ecosystem component (EC) species or receive some other type of management.

The Committee reviewed summary comments received from the Law Enforcement AP. The Committee also provided input on the draft purpose and need statements and the species that will continue to be considered in the amendment. In doing so, the Committee provided the following guidance and direction to staff:

- Edit the draft purpose and need statements.
 - Add a discussion of managing species with the resources that are available.
 - Further edit the need statement to include topics in addition to executive orders. Also incorporate the discussion of agency funding priorities and narrowing the scope of species that are managed.

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

SPECIES THAT MAY BE CONSIDERED FOR REMOVAL FROM THE FMU (POTENTIALLY):

- BAR JACK
- MISTY GROUPE
- SPADEFISH

SPECIES THAT MAY BE CONSIDERED FOR ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES OR AN ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT APPROACH (POTENTIALLY):

- 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 (PARTIAL OR TOTAL)
 - MISTY GROUPE (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 changes):

- CUBERA SNAPPER
- QUEEN SNAPPER
- BANDED RUDDERFISH

Black Sea Bass Follow-Up

In June 2025, the Council paused work on Amendment 56 until updates to the SEDAR 76 stock assessment, including incorporation of updated recreational catch estimates from MRIP, have been made. Council staff reviewed the historical timeline of Amendment 56 and where it stood when work was paused. The next step in development of this amendment is the release of updated recreational catch estimates, currently scheduled for later in 2026. After this, the assessment will be completed and development of Amendment 56 will resume. Amendment 56 will address long-term management actions. Short-term actions were already addressed in Regulatory Amendment 37, which is being prepared for submission to NOAA Fisheries.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: SEND A LETTER TO THE NOAA FISHERIES OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY REQUESTING EARLY ACCESS, IF POSSIBLE, TO RECREATIONAL ESTIMATES FOR BLACK SEA BASS TO BE USED IN THE STOCK ASSESSMENT.

Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper (Amendment 44)

Joint Snapper Grouper Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55 is in response to SEDAR 79 for mutton snapper and SEDAR 96 for yellowtail snapper, where both assessments indicated that the stocks are not overfished or experiencing overfishing. The amendment will establish the stock OFL and ABC and jurisdictional apportionment between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, establish regional ACLs, and modify South Atlantic sector allocations for each species. The Committee reviewed a decision document, discussed the updated amendment timeline, and data attributions for Monroe County. Staff also reviewed the actions and alternatives and started discussions on methods to update the weight conversion for the mutton snapper recreational ACL (Action 3). There was no committee action needed.

Innovative Management Approach for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

The proposed approach is intended as a reference document to help the Committee in their discussions. It is not a policy or in any way a binding document. There was a suggestion to add language to the overarching goal to clarify that this is a “living document” to help the Committee stay focused and intentional in their discussions. The Committee reviewed draft goalposts and principles and offered suggestions for clarifying language, including the Committee’s willingness to use non-traditional data sources (e.g., local knowledge, citizen science) to inform management decisions. The document will be cleaned up and included in the Council member binders for future Council meetings and is included here in [Appendix 2](#).

Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation

As part of the ongoing South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE), recent research has examined angler preferences to better understand attitudes and fishing behavior within the recreational fishery. The results are intended to inform enhancements to the Snapper Grouper MSE and support future decision-making by the South Atlantic Fishery

Management Council. The research identified distinct groups of anglers with differing preferences for management approaches. Findings from this work will be presented to the Snapper Grouper MSE Workgroup for consideration in model development. The Committee recommended continuing with the previously recommended management approaches of aggregate bag limits, mandatory stopping, temporal management, and spatial management and suggested adding to the SG aggregate limit a component to stop bottom fishing once the SG aggregate limit is reached.

Topics for Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC, on April 21-23, 2026. Below is a list of proposed topics to develop the AP's agenda:

- Black Grouper Fishery Performance Report and Stock Risk Rating
- Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper)
- Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency)
- Amendment 61 (Fishery Management Unit Revision)
 - Include Risk Value matrix in the Committee Chair Update
- Black Sea Bass: Progress/Upcoming Actions for Overall Management, Framework Amendment for Nearshore Pot Re-Opening and Trip Limit Adjustment, and feedback on recent season
 - Include commercial catch by gear for recent years
- Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation
- Southeast Reef Fish Survey Presentation
- Recreational Golden Tilefish Season
- Discussion about SG 2 (225-pound) Snapper Grouper Permits
- Updates: Best Fishing Practices, SEDAR, Citizen Science, State Red Snapper EFP Projects, Innovation Plan, Ongoing/Recently-Initiated Amendments

Other Business

Blueline Tilefish

In February 2026, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council sent a letter to the Council (available in 'Additional Materials') requesting population of the joint Council subcommittee to determine allocation of the blueline tilefish ABC north of Cape Hatteras, NC. Dewey Hemilright, Tom Roller, Amy Dukes, and Kerry Marhefka (as necessary) will serve as South Atlantic Council representatives on this subcommittee.

Commercial Trip Limits Applied to Sale

The Committee directed staff to include consideration of revisions to trip limit applications to sale of fish and clarification of trip completion to Amendment 60.

Black Sea Bass

The Committee directed staff to develop a framework amendment to consider re-opening the nearshore seasonal closed areas to on-demand black sea bass pot fishing and changing the trip limit for black sea bass pots. The Committee directed this item to be included on the AP's April agenda and to include an analysis of commercial catch by gear in recent years.

MOTION 5: INITIATE A FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT TO CONSIDER RE-OPENING THE NEARSHORE SEASONAL CLOSED AREAS TO ON-DEMAND BLACK SEA BASS POT FISHING AND CHANGING THE TRIP LIMIT FOR BLACK SEA BASS POTS.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 6: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF AMENDMENT 60 FOR CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC HEARING APPROVAL IN JUNE 2026.
- CONVENE THE SNAPPER GROUPE ADVISORY PANEL IN APRIL.
- INITIATE DEVELOPMENT OF FRAMEWORK AMENDMENTS TO ADDRESS SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES, HEADBOAT TRIP LIMITS, AND RE-OPENING OF NEARSHORE SEASONAL CLOSED AREAS FOR ON-DEMAND BLACK SEA BASS POTS.
- CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF AMENDMENT 44 FOR CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC HEARING APPROVAL IN JUNE, PENDING DATA AVAILABILITY.
- CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF AMENDMENT 61 FOR REVIEW IN JUNE 2026.
- DEVELOP A DRAFT ALLOCATION REVIEW REPORT FOR VERMILION SNAPPER FOR APPROVAL IN JUNE 2026.
- CONVENE THE SNAPPER GROUPE COMMERCIAL SUB-COMMITTEE BEFORE THE JUNE 2026 COUNCIL MEETING.
- WRITE A LETTER TO OST REQUESTING EARLY ACCESS FOR BLACK SEA BASS CATCH ESTIMATES FROM MRIP.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

APPENDIX 1

Summary Report **Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee** **March 2-3, 2026**

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) met on March 2-3, 2026 to further develop Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region .

The Sub-Committee approved the agenda for the March 2026 meeting and minutes for the December 2025 meeting.

1. Amendment 60 (Commercial Permits and Trip Efficiency)

Council staff updated the Sub-Committee on progress made since the December meeting, including draft actions and alternatives. NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff presented information on commercial snapper grouper permits, analyses of commercial trip limit changes, and information on a potential system for fishermen to notify law enforcement if they intend to switch gear within a snapper grouper trip. The Sub-Committee reviewed actions and alternatives as currently drafted and provided the following guidance for further amendment development:

***The Council directed staff to schedule an additional Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee meeting for April 2026, ahead of the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meeting. This meeting will allow further discussion of the amendment ahead of consideration for public hearing approval in June 2026.

Purpose and Need

- Add 'long-term stability' to the Purpose statement
- Incorporate language from Executive Order 14276.

Action 1. Remove the 2-for-1 snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit policy

- The Sub-Committee discussed several aspects of SG 1 permits based on the presented information.
- Revise action and alternative language to specify this is the "unlimited permit".
- The Sub-Committee decided not to include consideration of a trigger for a permit pool in this action at this time.

DISCUSSION AT FULL COUNCIL:

The Council acknowledged that:

- Some fishermen have expressed opposition to removing the 2 for 1 provision
- There have been comments re concern over leasing of vessels and the associated permits.

Council members discussed these concerns and NOAA Fisheries General Counsel (GC) clarified once more that NMFS doesn't allow leasing of permits. There may be ongoing situations where fishermen who aren't full-time commercial fishermen (e.g., recreational) are leasing vessels with SG1 permits to be able to exceed the recreational limit. It is not known how prevalent this situation is. The discussion will continue at the Sub-Committee meeting in April 2026 as well as the potential to consider limitations on permit ownership in Amendment 60.

FOR APRIL SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING: Request information from SERO Permits Office to inform the sub-committee's discussion on leasing.

Action 2. Revise commercial trip limits for snapper grouper species

- Include consideration of the following trip limits for the following species:
 - o Vermilion Snapper
 - Season 1: 1,000 lbs gw; 1,250 lbs gw; 1,500 lbs gw; 2,000 lbs gw; 3,000 lbs gw
 - Season 2: 1,000 lbs gw; 1,250 lbs gw; 1,500 lbs gw; 2,000 lbs gw; 3,000 lbs gw
 - o Greater Amberjack
 - Season 1: 1,200 lbs ww or gw; 1,500 lbs ww or gw; 2,000 lbs ww or gw; 2,500 lbs ww or gw
 - Season 2: 1,200 lbs ww or gw; 1,500 lbs ww or gw; 2,000 lbs ww or gw; 2,500 lbs ww or gw
 - o Red Porgy
 - Season 1: 15 fish, 30 fish, 45 fish
 - Season 2: 15 fish, 30 fish, 45 fish
 - o Gray Triggerfish
 - Season 1: 1,000 lbs ww; 1,500 lbs ww; 2,000 lbs ww
 - Season 2: 1,000 lbs ww; 1,500 lbs ww; 2,000 lbs ww
 - o Red Grouper: 200 lbs gw; 300 lbs gw
 - o Hogfish (GA-NC): 500 lbs ww; 1,000 lbs ww
- Some concern was expressed for the possibility of localized depletion from trip limits that are set too high, especially for groupers.

DISCUSSION AT FULL COUNCIL:

Council members expressed concern about including gray triggerfish in this action due to low trends of abundance in recent years, lack of a stock assessment, and also comment expressed by stakeholders during comment session in opposition to changing the gray triggerfish trip limit.

MOTION: REMOVE GRAY TRIGGERFISH FROM ACTION 2

APPROVED BY COUNCIL (1 OPPOSED)

- The Council clarified that the species included for trip limit revisions in Action 2 do not need to be the same species that are considered for temporary adjustments to trip limits under Action 3.

Council members also discussed removal of red porgy from Action 2, but a motion to remove red porgy failed. The Council directed additional discussion about the potential for localized

depletion under increased trip limits and user conflicts on more accessible offshore reefs, especially regarding greater amberjack.

MOTION: REMOVE CONSIDERATION OF THE 3,000 LBS TRIP LIMIT FOR VERMILION SNAPPER (BOTH SEASONS).

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Action 3. Establish a process for temporary trip limit increases or decreases for snapper grouper species

- The Sub-Committee reviewed draft language for step-ups and step-downs.
- Trip limit increases and decreases should be applied through an annual evaluation, such that years with landings significantly below the ACL would be followed with an increased trip limit in the following year and years with landings that result in early closures would be followed with a decreased trip limit in the following year.
- The process for adjusting the trip limit should be carried out through a temporary rule from the NMFS Regional Administrator (RA).
- Species to consider for this action: gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, hogfish (GA-NC), red grouper, red porgy, vermilion snapper, gag, and golden tilefish (hook and line)
- The Sub-Committee directed initial language to be developed to consider trip limit adjustments up to 25% higher or 25% lower than the trip limit.
- The Sub-Committee directed staff to work with SERO staff to develop revised language for temporary trip limit adjustments.
 - An initial template of this language has been developed. This language will require further review by the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT).
 - The process would involve annual RA consultation with the Council prior to the beginning of the next season, including projected landings for the ongoing season.
 - The Council would develop and recommend a trip limit for next season. If the RA decides an adjusted trip limit should be implemented, the RA will issue a temporary rule setting the adjusted trip limit for the next season.

DISCUSSION AT FULL COUNCIL:

- The Council added gag and golden tilefish (hook and line) to the list of species for consideration under Action 3.
- The Council directed staff to begin analyzing the range of temporary trip limit increases using 50% higher or lower than the trip limit, and having further conversations about specific poundage limits for species in April.
- In April, staff will also provide draft language indicating the triggers for considering a trip limit increase or decrease, and request Sub-Committee feedback.

Action 4. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

- The Sub-Committee clarified that bottom longline gear is specifically noted because it is already a legal gear in the snapper grouper fishery; therefore, it is not subject to the same restrictions as for unauthorized gear.

- The Sub-Committee discussed the possibility of a notification requirement for vessels that intend to switch from or to bottom longline gear during a trip.
 - The Sub-Committee discussed the timing of notification to be prior to trip departure or at-sea and preferred the notification to occur prior to trip departure.
- Add another alternative that is the same as **Alternative 2**, except add a notification requirement for prior to departure.

[Return to Committee Report](#)

APPENDIX 2
REVISED INNOVATION PLAN DOCUMENT
(yellow highlights indicate items added/modified at this meeting)

Snapper Grouper Innovation Plan

March 2026

“The Council is where fisheries science meets reality.”

~ Eugenio Pineiro Soler, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

The Snapper Grouper Innovation plan is a way to bring together the current priorities of the SG committee, the priorities and realities expressed by NOAA Fisheries, and consider a new path to improve how the committee operates. The intent of this plan is to reflect the Presidential Executive Orders, the changes in the type and amount of data for species within the Fishery Management Unit, and accept a greater level of uncertainty and risk by the SG committee when managing this species complex. **The committee and this plan will consider the sustainability of the species in the complex.**

Overarching goal – Establish goalposts and principles for SG committee discussions. Consider ways to streamline and be more efficient during SG committee discussions. This document does not override or replace any obligations to MSA and the National Standards.

Goal for March meeting – Review Goalposts, Principles, and Committee Streamlining suggestions. Consider any additional edits and seek to finalize this living document at this meeting. Begin incorporating concepts into committee discussions **and print for Council member notebook that comes to every meeting.**

Goalposts

- **Recreational yield (opportunity) is about access and having SG species available to harvest**
 - Recreational anglers want to be able to have the opportunity to harvest SG species when their schedule allows (e.g., weather/life circumstances). Recreational anglers want optimum opportunity and year-round access to harvest SG species. Anglers throughout the Council region have different preferences on what SG species they prefer to harvest at certain times of the year. Anglers also want good quality opportunities for harvest. **Opportunity for recreational anglers could be defined as time on the water.**
- **Commercial yield is about providing access to seafood for consumers**
 - Commercial fishermen need prioritization of efficient harvest (maximum harvest value with minimum effort). Commercial fishing is about access at all levels,

including the harvester, dealer, market, truck drivers, restaurant, and consumers. MSA defines this as greatest benefit to the nation.

- **Optimize year-round access to SG species for commercial and recreational sectors, to the extent possible**
 - The committee intends to optimize access. This optimization could result in consistent, year-round availability and access to SG species. This concept could help restaurants that are challenged in being able to find year-round local fish to satisfy menus. The overall intent is to allow fishermen the opportunity to harvest the resource when weather, personal schedules or markets are favorable.
- **Consider regional and temporal management of fisheries to account for differences across the Council region**
 - The committee can consider split-seasons to spread access throughout the region. The committee also intends to use approaches that consider local seasons and preferences, including times of the year and holidays. **This may include a range of spatial scales (e.g., sub-regions and state by state).**
- **Consider holistic view of the SG fishery/ Consider multi-species nature of this fishery when making decisions**
 - The committee will consider the multi-species nature and regime shifts of species when making decisions.
 - The focus on single species management that has developed in response to ACL-based management isn't serving the fishery well. The committee will consider ways to manage co-occurring species together since targeting one SG species often results in the bycatch of other SG species. The committee will consider how other councils manage their fisheries to consider ways to innovate.
- **Maximize trip efficiencies or ROI for commercial sector**
 - **There is widespread support for being more efficient, but the committee needs to consider how to define efficiency across the sectors and then develop ways to increase efficiency. There may be trade offs**
 - **Efficiency is hard to define and the definition of efficiency or satisfaction will likely vary for recreational and commercial sectors while reflecting the different desires and needs of the sectors. In general, actions that promote each sector achieving its yield (see above) while reducing its costs and expenses could be considered to promote efficiency. The Committee could evaluate an action's impact on efficiency by considering how it affects yield (pounds, access, opportunity, flexibility) and**

costs (fuel, time, discarding, lost opportunity). The Committee will consider more than just simple economic efficiencies and costs in addressing this item.

- For the commercial sector, efficiency may not be the correct word. It may be more appropriate to consider “Return on Investment” as the metric to optimize.
- Spreading harvest out to be more predictable and steady can be more economically efficient (avoid flooded markets, be able to shop around for better price) in the commercial sector, and may help provide year-round access in the recreational sector.
- There is a strong likelihood that opposing objectives will make improving efficiency and satisfaction challenging. For example, higher trip catches may necessitate shorter seasons or other access limitations.

- **Maximize trip satisfaction for recreational sector**

- Spreading harvest out to be more predictable and considering how to provide year-round access in the recreational sector.

- **Take more risks in making decisions**

- The committee intends to take more risks in making decisions. The committee recognizes that limited amount of available quota for some species may work against flexibility and risk-taking.
- The committee intends to learn from other Councils’ processes to try new management actions and find ways to move management actions/changes more rapidly.
- **ACTION ITEM:** The Committee expects to be provided scientific recommendations from the Science Center and the SSC that define the risk of various harvest levels but do not make risk determinations on behalf of the Council. The Committee also expects to be provided analyses that are risk neutral.

- **Don’t let the search for perfection stop progress**

- Don’t be paralyzed by uncertainties, challenges, or imperfect data.
- Perfect decisions are functionally impossible in the uncertain world of fisheries.
- Decisions taken by the Committee can be changed in the future and are subject to change as new information becomes available.
- Make better use of non-traditional data sources

- **We will never have the perfect solution for everyone**

- The committee seeks to balance expectations and manage tradeoffs among user groups.
- This approach could result in an improvement in trust but also may result in unpopular management decisions.

Principles to get to Goalposts

In our role as Council members of this SG committee, we intend to consider the following principles to help us achieve our goalposts when conducting our committee business.

This list includes items that could be considered now and items that are aspirational for when more data could be available in the future.

Can be considered now

- Ensure local knowledge is factored into management decisions
- Take more risks and try new things to achieve goals and in making management decisions
- Be proactive
 - Get ahead of an issue; don't wait to react to a stock assessment and don't wait for the Cadillac (or perfect) stock assessment. Some of the tools that are available for being proactive include: SAFE Report, SERFS report, interim analyses, Fishery Performance Reports, public comments, ACL monitoring, more real-time detailed quota monitoring access.
 - The committee intends to act on the information they have not the information they hope to have.
- Minimize wasted fish
 - Turn discards into landings. This could lead to higher trip satisfaction and trip efficiency.
- Focus on management tools available to us now

Economic

- Consider how SG commercial fishermen operate as portfolio fishermen
 - Conduct regular economic evaluations of the fishery.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Conduct an economic portfolio evaluation of the snapper grouper fishery. Consider the portfolio approach presented by Steve Cadrin to the SSC and

the prior staff work by Kari Buck. Update this information periodically and provide an economic overview in Council notebook.

- Consider/Continue opportunities for new entrants for permitted fisheries and limited entry fisheries

Science and data collection

- SG committee will consider simplified science to meet management needs
- The committee supports interim assessments, more timely data on stock status for a prioritized list of species, and stock assessments that match the available data. The committee realizes that fewer traditional stock assessments may be available in the coming years and seeks to put more confidence in simpler methods to assess stock statuses. The committee supports and promotes efforts to provide/obtain ecosystem and multi-species analyses for supporting catch recommendations and evaluating management alternatives.
- The committee seeks to use more cooperative research projects to obtain critical data
 - Cooperative research will provide more engagement with stakeholders. Cooperative research will also support the council's citizen science initiative.
- Continue to support the Council's Citizen Science Program
- The scientific advice provided to the Committee must move beyond single species assessments and recommendations to support the Committee's effort to move beyond single species management solutions.
- **ACTION ITEM:** Request that Council staff, SSC and SEFSC work together to develop a plan to address the above committee expectations.
 - Provide more timely stock status evaluations using simpler approaches that can be supported given future resource expectations
 - Develop multi-species and ecosystem-informed catch recommendation approaches
 - Identify data gaps that can be addressed through cooperative research projects
 - Identify timelines and deliverables
 - Consider a workgroup or a workshop to develop this action item
- **ACTION ITEM:** Request that NOAA Fisheries provide a thorough explanation of how discards (rec and comm) are handled, from data collection to estimation to use in stock assessment to use in stock projections to developing fishing level recommendations (OFL/ABC/ACL/ACT). Thoroughly compare how discards are addressed in the South Atlantic

with the Gulf, and summarize how discards are addressed in other regions noting key differences in data collection, analysis, and catch specifications.

Ideas for Process of SG committee and committee efficiency principles

In our role as Council members of this SG committee, we will consider the following items when conducting our committee business.

- **Booklet of commonly requested information provided at each Council meeting and on the website**
 - The council staff will provide binders for SG committee members that include commonly used items such as this innovation plan, SEDAR schedule, workplan, types of Amendments, etc. Each Council member will be required to bring this binder to each meeting. The Council staff will also have these items available electronically on the Council website.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Completed by staff for the December 2025 meeting, with updates planned as needed at subsequent meetings.
- **Maximize meeting time of the SG committee**
 - The committee will maximize our allotted meeting time by using subcommittees to tackle niche issues (e.g., wreckfish subcommittee) that can save time during full SG committee discussions. The subcommittee could be comprised of a subset of members of the SG committee with expertise in the topic that will make recommendations to the SG committee.
 - The SG committee will also consider the use of a “process word/safe word” that can be used to stop or redirect the discussion and call the question quicker for motions.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Request that staff remind the Council to think about the Innovation plan during discussion at the following points in management discussions:
 - **When developing the rationale for purpose and need of an Amendment/Framework**
 - **When discussing individual management action alternatives in a plan amendment/framework and Council rationale.**
- **Be more responsive and timely**
 - The SG committee seeks to be more responsive and timely to SG fishery issues. The committee seeks to make hard decisions more rapidly and will find the proper vehicle for its actions in order to made actions move faster through the process. The committee seeks to optimize the use of expedited procedures (e.g., expedited

framework actions) to move items faster. The committee seeks to have more timely responses to assessment information and use their informed judgement when presented with conflicting and incomplete information instead of being paralyzed by inaction.

- **Get out of the rut and be more innovative and efficient**
 - The committee seeks to operate in a solution-oriented way, getting away from single species management when possible, and is willing to test new and innovative ideas, and makes difficult decisions when needed that are in alignment with fishery goals.
- **More communication and collaboration between states and NOAA outside the Council meeting**

In order to tackle challenges between meetings and allow the committee meetings to operate more efficiently NOAA and state agency representatives should work collaboratively.

Words matter

As we conduct our business as the SG committee:

- Encourage committee members to use tact and know that words matter
- Seek to avoid broad, blaming/shaming statements, especially those directed at particular sectors, industries, or organizations

Responsibility to Stakeholders

In our role as Council members on this committee we:

- Seek to understand our audience better
- Desire stakeholder and fishermen satisfaction
- Seek to keep fishermen engaged
- Desire to improve the confidence of stakeholders in the federal fishery management process

NEXT STEP – UPDATE, INCLUDE FINAL INNOVATION PLAN IN BINDER

[Return to Committee Report](#)