

Amendment 37 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Options Paper (3/17/15)



Amendment 37 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 37) would potentially include several actions pertaining to management of the snapper grouper fishery. To date, the Council has indicated that the following items should be included in the amendment:

- Modification of the hogfish management unit in response to stock assessment
- Partial delegation of commercial and/or recreational management of East Florida-Florida Keys hogfish to the state of Florida in federal waters adjacent to the state of Florida
- Adjustment to hogfish fishing levels and management measures for both Atlantic stocks of hogfish (GA-NC and East Florida-Florida Keys)
- Revision to the composition of the Jacks Complex and commercial management measures for almaco jack
- Removal of size limits for deepwater species (silk snapper, queen snapper, and blackfin snapper)
- Modification to spawning season closure for shallow water grouper
- Modification of size limit for red grouper
- Modification of bag limit for black sea bass

Why is the Council Considering Action?

Hogfish

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission completed a stock assessment for hogfish in 2014. The South Atlantic Council's SSC reviewed the assessment and provided fishing level recommendations in October 2014. The Council received the SSC's recommendations at their December 2014 meeting. Based on genetic evidence the SSC supported treating hogfish in the South Atlantic as two stocks: Georgia-North Carolina (GA-NC) and East Florida-Florida Keys. Each assessment was then evaluated with regard to fishing level recommendations. The SSC recommended that catch level recommendations for the GA-NC stock be developed using the Only Reliable Catch Stocks (ORCS) approach, as outlined in Level 4 of the Council's ABC control rule. For the East Florida-Florida Keys stock, the SSC considered the benchmark assessment to represent the best available science and recommended it for use in management. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) concurred with this determination. The assessment results indicated the East Florida-Florida Keys stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished. The SSC then applied the ABC Control Rule and recommended a P^* of 27.5%, and a $P_{REBUILD}$ of 72.5% for that stock.

The ABC for the GA-NC stock, as recommended by the SSC, is 28,161 lbs ww. ABC for the East Florida-Florida Keys stock will be determined from projections based on criteria specified by the Council at their March 2015 meeting.

Jacks Complex

The Council held a brief discussion at the December 2012 meeting regarding possible re-structuring of the Jacks Complex and the Deepwater Complex. One of the factors mentioned to support such a revision involved the productivity levels of both almaco jack and banded rudderfish. From the perspective of the commercial industry, the productivity of these two species is much higher than the established annual catch limit for the Jacks Complex. At that time, the reason for suggesting a re-structuring of the Deepwater Complex involved high levels of yellowedge grouper discards when fishermen target snowy grouper.

At the March 2013 Council meeting, the Council approved the following motion: **THE SNAPPER GROUPE COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO CONSIDER RE-STRUCTURING OF THE SNAPPER GROUPE FMU TO REMOVE JACKS.**

In June 2014, discussion ensued regarding the composition of the Jacks Complex. The Complex currently includes almaco jack, banded rudderfish, and lesser amberjack. The Council approved the following motion: **DIRECT STAFF TO DETERMINE THE BEST VEHICLE TO SEPARATE ALMACO JACK FROM THE JACKS COMPLEX.**

In December 2014, the Council approved the following motion: **DIRECT STAFF TO DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES FOR AN ALMACO TRIP LIMIT. BRING TO AP FOR THEIR INPUT IN 2015. DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES THAT WOULD ALLOW FOR YEAR-ROUND FISHERY.**

While discussing this motion, Council members agreed that the ACL for almaco jack is being caught very early. Also, the species is encountered very frequently when fishing commercially for other snapper grouper species. A trip limit would allow the ACL to last longer and fishermen would benefit economically, especially once the ACLs for other, more popular species, are met.

In March 2015, the Council approved the following motions:

1. DIRECT STAFF TO ADD AN ACTION TO AMENDMENT 37 TO EXAMINE ALTERNATIVES TO DISAGGREGATE THE JACKS COMPLEX.
2. DIRECT STAFF TO ADD AN ACTION TO AMENDMENT 37 TO EXAMINE A COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT FOR ALMACO JACK.

Removal of size limits for deepwater species

Numerous snapper grouper species were placed in Complexes through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment, which implemented ACLs for all unassessed snapper grouper species. Complexes were formed based on a suite of criteria, including biological factors and co-occurrence with other species. Species in the Deepwater Complex tend to be found in deep water and therefore are typically associated with high discard mortality. Three species currently included in the Deepwater Complex – silk snapper, queen snapper, and blackfin snapper – have a 12” minimum size limit. These size limits were put in place long ago, before estimates of discard mortality were available and long before the creation of the various Complexes. To curb discard losses, the Council could take action to eliminate minimum size limit requirements for these deepwater species.

Adjustment to spawning season closure for shallow water grouper

During stakeholder meetings held as part of the Council’s Visioning Project in 2014, fishermen in North Carolina stated that the current annual 4-month spawning season closure does not fit the spawning periodicity of red grouper at that latitude. Fishermen maintain that red grouper harvested off North Carolina are frequently in spawning condition when they are allowed to be harvested starting on May 1.

Stakeholders have also urged the Council to revisit the current 4-month spawning season closure for the rest of the species to which the closure applies to determine whether it is still necessary and whether it covers the appropriate timeframe. Species to which the current closure applies are: gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney.

The Council is concerned about the decline in red grouper and is considering extending the spawning season closure.

Adjustment to minimum size limit for red grouper

In December 2011, the Council approved Amendment 24 to the Snapper Grouper FMP. The amendment specified ABC and fishing levels for red grouper in response to the stock assessment (SEDAR 19). Amendment 24 also specified a rebuilding schedule and a rebuilding strategy for red grouper. The following became effective on July 11, 2012:

- Rebuilding schedule = 2011-2020
- ABC = yield at 75%F_{MSY}
- Allocations - commercial = 44%; recreational = 56%
- ACL = OY = ABC. Specify commercial and recreational ACLs for red grouper for 2012, 2013, and 2014 and beyond. The ACL for 2014 would remain in effect until modified.
 2014 ACL = 780,000 lbs ww.
 2014 commercial ACL = 343,200 lbs ww
 2014 recreational ACL = 436,800 lbs ww

The table below shows how commercial and recreational landings (lbs ww) compare to the ACLs that have been in place since 2012 as a result of actions taken through Amendment 24. As of 2014, the

commercial and recreational fisheries combined only took 20% of the ACL. Additionally, a preliminary look at MARMAP data for red grouper shows a steady decline in CPUE in their samples from about 2003 (Mel Bell, SCDNR, Personal Communication).

Year	ACL	Comm ACL	Comm Landings	Rec ACL	Rec Landings	Total Landings	% under ACL	% of ACL Landed
2011	573,000	252,120	*221,388	320,880				
2012	647,000	284,680	157,479	362,320	101,604	259,083	60.0%	40.0%
2013	718,000	315,920	117,461	402,080	87,123	204,584	71.5%	28.5%
2014	780,000	343,200	130,139	436,800	26,107	156,246	80.0%	20.0%

* excludes GA landings due to confidentiality

Below are commercial landings (lbs ww; from ACCSP online data excluding GA landings due to confidentiality). Additionally, according to the SCDNR, total commercial landings of red grouper for SC in 2014 were down to 10,019 lbs.

Year	FL	NC	SC
2004	18,325	159,700	47,882
2005	19,762	140,333	30,590
2006	17,915	240,782	72,411
2007	22,940	448,580	127,869
2008	12,541	474,404	159,049
2009	9,292	296,255	100,525
2010	5,501	231,780	75,816
2011	9,116	154,273	57,999
2012	10,356	111,781	23,988
2013	11,270	72,259	16,467

The Council is concerned about the decline in red grouper landings and is considering a change in the size limit.

Adjustment to recreational bag limit of black sea bass

Regulatory Amendment 9 implemented a reduction in the bag limit for black sea bass from 15 fish to 5 fish. This change became effective on June 22, 2011. At that time, the Council provided the following rationale for their decision:

“The Council chose as their preferred alternative a reduction in the bag limit from 15 fish to 5 fish (**Preferred Sub-Alternative 13b**). Their decision was based on public support for a reduced bag limit and the fact that a large percentage of recreational trips result in approximately 5 black sea bass per person. Hence the Council considered this appropriate as an interim measure until the results of the stock assessment are available late in 2011. Data presented to the Council in March indicate that if the recreational ACL remains at 409,000 pounds gutted weight, it is projected that the season would close on March 6, 2012 assuming the 2011/12 catch rate is similar to the 2010/2011 catch rate. It is important to note that current regulations dictate that the recreational ACL be reduced by the amount of the overage during the following fishing season. At the same time, the black sea bass population is continuing to grow such that the encounters will be more frequent and individual fish will weigh more resulting in the ACL being reached sooner. All this points to a projected closing date sooner than March

6, 2012. The Council’s intent is to have this bag limit reduction in place by the start of the next fishing year on June 1, 2011. The Council recognizes that the recreational ACL for the 2011/12 fishing year that begins on June 1st will be reduced by the amount of the recreational overage and expects the reduced bag limit to help lengthen the season.”

Since then, the recreational ACL for black sea bass increased substantially and the stock assessment indicated that black sea bass in the South Atlantic are neither overfished nor undergoing overfishing (SEDAR 25 Update 2013).

Below are recreational landings compared to the recreational ACL for fishing years 2011/2012 through 2013/2014 (preliminary). Preliminary data indicate that only 56% of the recreational ACL was met during the 2013/2014 fishing season. Therefore, the Council is exploring options to increase the bag limit to allow the recreational sector to land more of their ACL.

Year	Recreational ACL	Total Recreational Landings	% ACL	Closure
2011/2012	341,747	491,676	144%	10/17/11
2012/2013	409,000	428,785	104%	9/4/12
2013/2014	1,033,980	579,678	56%	--

Possible Actions and Alternatives

Action 1. Modify the Fishery Management Unit for Hogfish

Alternative 1 (No action). There is a Gulf stock and South Atlantic stock of hogfish separated at the **South Atlantic** Council boundary.

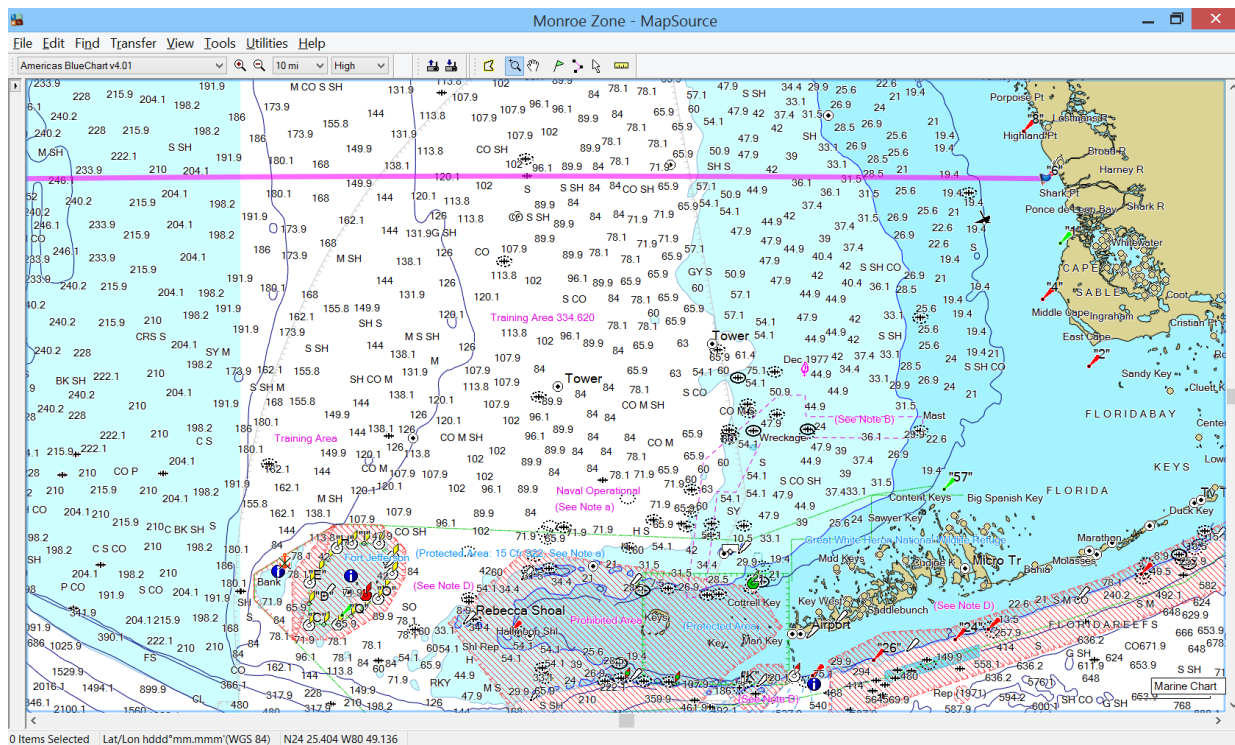
Alternative 2. Modify the FMU to specify an **Atlantic** Georgia through North Carolina (GA-NC) stock of hogfish **to include Georgia through North Carolina** from the North Carolina/Virginia border to the **Georgia/Florida border**.

Alternative 3. Modify the FMU to specify a **Florida** an **East Florida-Florida Keys** stock of hogfish **to include** from the Florida/Georgia state line border south to:

Sub-alternative a. The **South Atlantic/Gulf of Mexico** Council boundary.

Sub-alternative b. The **Monroe/Collier County** line.

Sub-alternative c. Shark Point on Florida southwest coast.



Action 2. Partial delegation of commercial and/or recreational management of Florida the East Florida-Florida Keys hogfish stock to the State of Florida in Federal Waters Adjacent to the State of Florida

Alternative 1 (No action). Do not delegate management of hogfish in the Reef Fish and Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plans for the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, respectively.

Alternative 2. Determine specific recreational management items for delegation to the State of Florida for hogfish:

Sub-alternative 2a. Size limits

Sub-alternative 2b. Seasons

Sub-alternative 2c. Bag limits

Sub-alternative 2d. Minor modifications to existing allowable gear (e.g., circle hook requirement)

Alternative 3. Determine specific commercial management items for delegation to the State of Florida for hogfish:

Sub-alternative 3a. Size limits

Sub-alternative 3b. Seasons

Sub-alternative 3c. Commercial trip limits

Sub-alternative 3d. Minor modifications to existing allowable gear (e.g., circle hook requirement)

Action 3. Establish Acceptable Biological Catch and Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) for Atlantic the GA-NC and East Florida-Florida Keys stocks of Hogfish

Alternative 1 (No action). Maintain the current commercial and recreational ACLs for hogfish (FL to NC) based on the South Atlantic Council’s Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The Current ABC = 137,824 lbs ww and ACL = ABC. The commercial ACL = 49,469 lbs ww (36.69%) and the recreational ACL = 85,355 lbs ww (63.31%).

Alternative 2. Establish an ACL for the GA-NC stock. Specify commercial and recreational ACLs based on existing sector allocations (36.69% commercial and 63.31% recreational).

Sub-alternative 2a. ACL = ABC = 28,161 lbs ww. Commercial ACL = 10,332 lbs ww. Recreational ACL = 17,829 lbs ww.

Sub-alternative 2b. ACL = 95%ABC = 26,753 lbs ww. Commercial ACL = 9,816 lbs ww. Recreational ACL = 16,937 lbs ww.

Sub-alternative 2c. ACL = 90%ABC = 25,345 lbs ww. Commercial ACL = 9,299 lbs ww. Recreational ACL = 16,046 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Establish an ACL for the East Florida-Florida Keys stock. Specify commercial and recreational ACLs for 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 and beyond. The ACL for 2019 will remain in effect until modified. ACLs in 2017, 2018, and 2019 will not increase automatically in a subsequent year if present year projected catch has exceeded the total ACL. Specify commercial and recreational ACLs based on existing sector allocations (36.69% commercial and 63.31% recreational).

Sub-alternative 3a. ACL = ABC = X. Commercial ACL = x. Recreational ACL = x.

Sub-alternative 3b. ACL = 95%ABC = X. Commercial ACL = x. Recreational ACL = x.

Sub-alternative 3c. ACL = 90%ABC = X. Commercial ACL = x. Recreational ACL = x.

(insert table of values when projections are available)

Action 4. Modify the Recreational Annual Catch Target (ACT) for Hogfish

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not modify the ACT for hogfish for the recreational sector. The current ACT is 59,390 lbs ww and applies to hogfish throughout the South Atlantic Council’s jurisdiction.

Alternative 2. Establish an ACT for the GA-NC stock of hogfish for the recreational sector that equals the recreational $ACL \cdot (1 - PSE)$ or $ACL \cdot 0.5$, whichever is greater.

Year	Hogfish ACT (lbs ww)		
	Action 3; Sub-alt 2a ($ACL=ABC$)	Action 3; Sub-alt 2b ($ACL=95\%ABC$)	Action 3; Sub-alt 2c ($ACL=90\%ABC$)
2016			
2017			
2018			
2019 and beyond until modified			

Note: Calculations use the most recent 5 years of recreational landings to obtain the PSE.

	Hogfish PSE
Year	
2010	
2011	
2012	
2013	
2014	
Average	

Alternative 3. Establish an ACT for the East Florida-Florida Keys) stock of hogfish for the recreational sector that equals the recreational $ACL \cdot (1 - PSE)$ or $ACL \cdot 0.5$, whichever is greater.

Year	Hogfish ACT (lbs ww)		
	Action 3; Sub-alt 3a (ACL=ABC)	Action 3; Sub-alt 3b (ACL=95%ABC)	Action 3; Sub-alt 3c (ACL=90%ABC)
2016			
2017			
2018			
2019 and beyond until modified			

Note: Calculations use the most recent 5 years of recreational landings to obtain the PSE.

NOTE TO IPT: ADD ACTIONS FOR COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES??

From Gregg: The Council did not ask for this so I assumed they just wanted to update the ACLs/ACTs and have the seasons close. However, we should show the current management measures and AMs (from Generic AM amendment) and perhaps some tables for each stock (GA-NC and East Florida-Florida Keys) that show: (1) commercial catch/trip to evaluate trip limits, (2) recreational catch/trip to evaluate bag limits, (3) sizes landed to evaluate commercial and recreational size limits. Need to look at diving sector separately, if at all possible.

The Snapper Grouper AP has made the following recommendations for hogfish management:

April 2012:

MOTION: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER INCREASING THE MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT OF GRAY TRIGGERFISH AND HOGFISH TO 14 INCHES

November 2012 & April 2013:

MOTION: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE 3 UNDER ACTION 3 AS THE PREFERRED

Action 3. Increase the minimum size limit for hogfish

Alternative 3. Increase the minimum size limit for hogfish in federal waters to 14 inches FL.

(Note: This motions pertains to an action originally included in Regulatory Amendment 14. The Council subsequently removed it from consideration in the amendment pending completion of the stock assessment).

November 2013:

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER INCREASING THE MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT FOR HOGFISH ***LOOK AT 14 TO 18 INCHES****

Action 5. Modify the Composition of the Jacks Complex

Alternative 1 (No action). Do not modify the composition of the Jacks Complex. The Jacks Complex comprises almaco jack, lesser amberjack, and banded rudderfish. Each species in the Jacks Complex contributes to the total ACL, and the ACLs and AMs are monitored and applied at the complex level, not at the individual species level.

	Commercial ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL & ACT (lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Comm allocation	Rec allocation
Jacks Complex	189,422	ACL=267,799 ACT=165,590	457,221		
Almaco Jack	147,322	ACL=155,195 ACT=109,288	302,517	48.70%	51.30%
Banded Rudderfish	37,829	ACL = 107,605 ACT=53,802	145,434	26.01%	73.99%
Lesser Amberjack	4,270	ACL=5,000 ACT=2,500	9,270	46.07%	53.93%

Alternative 2. Remove almaco jack from the Jacks Complex and specify ACLs for almaco jack accordingly:

Commercial ACL=147,322 lbs ww (48.70%)
 Recreational ACL=155,195 lbs ww (51.30%)
 Recreational ACT=109,288 lbs ww
 Total ACL=302,517 lbs ww

The Jacks Complex would comprise banded rudderfish and lesser amberjack and the commercial and recreational ACLs and recreational ACT would be specified as follows:

	Commercial ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL & ACT (lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Comm allocation	Rec allocation
Jacks Complex	42,100	ACL=112,604 ACT=56,302	154,704		
Banded Rudderfish	37,829	ACL = 107,605 ACT=53,802	145,434	26.01%	73.99%
Lesser Amberjack	4,270	ACL=5,000 ACT=2,500	9,270	46.07%	53.93%

Alternative 3. Disaggregate the Jacks Complex and specify individual ACLs and recreational ACTs for each species in the Jacks Complex.

Almaco jack:

Commercial ACL=147,322 lbs ww (48.70%)
 Recreational ACL=155,195 lbs ww (51.30%)
 Recreational ACT=109,288 lbs ww
 Total ACL=302,517 lbs ww

Banded rudderfish:

Commercial ACL=37,829 lbs ww (26.01%)
Recreational ACL=107,605 lbs ww (73.99%)
Recreational ACT=53,802 lbs ww
Total ACL = 145,434 lbs ww

Lesser amberjack:

Commercial ACL=4,270 lbs ww (46.07%)
Recreational ACL=5,000 lbs ww (53.93%)
Recreational ACT=2,500 lbs ww
Total ACL=9,270 lbs ww

Action 6. Establish a commercial trip limit for almaco jack

Alternative 1 (No action). Do not establish a commercial trip limit for almaco jack. There is no trip limit for almaco jack and the commercial ACL=147,322 pounds whole weight (lbs ww).

Alternative 2. Establish a commercial trip limit for almaco jack of **X lbs ww**

Note to IPT: Insert a table with commercial landings by trip and % reduction to evaluate appropriate alternatives for a trip limit.

Others??

Action 7. Remove minimum size limits for deepwater snapper grouper species

Alternative 1 (No action). Do not remove the minimum size limits for queen snapper, silk snapper, and blackfin snapper. The minimum size limit for these deepwater species is 12 inches total length (TL).

Alternative 2. Remove the 12" TL minimum size limit for queen snapper.

Alternative 3. Remove the 12" TL minimum size limit for silk snapper.

Alternative 4. Remove the 12" TL minimum size limit for blackfin snapper.

Action 8. Adjustment to annual spawning season closure for shallow water grouper

Alternative 1 (No action). Do not modify the annual January 1 through April 30 spawning season closure for shallow water grouper. Commercial and recreational harvest of the following species is prohibited annually from January 1 to April 30: gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney.

Alternative 2. Extend the spawning season closure for red grouper by one month. Commercial and recreational harvest of red grouper would be prohibited annually from January 1 through May 31.

***Alternative 3.** Remove the annual spawning season closure for all affected grouper species in the South Atlantic:

Sub-alternative 3a. North of 28 degrees North latitude.

Sub-alternative 3b. Throughout the Council's jurisdiction.

(*Alternative structured to match what is being proposed in the Joint Amendment on South Florida Management)

Others???

- **For each sector separately?**
- **Rolling closure from south to north for all species?**
- **Rolling closure from south to north for some species?**
- **Separate alternatives for gag or black grouper?**

Action 9. Adjustment to minimum size limit for red grouper

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not adjust the minimum size limit for red grouper. The minimum size limit (commercial and recreational) for red grouper is 20 inches total length (TL).

Alternative 2. Increase the minimum size limit (commercial and recreational) for red grouper to 21 inches TL.

Alternative 3. Increase the minimum size limit (commercial and recreational) for red grouper to 22 inches TL.

Note to IPT: Insert a table with commercial and recreational landings by size and % reduction to evaluate appropriate alternatives for a minimum size limit.

Others??

- **Increase size limit to 24”?** This was suggested at port meetings in NC – 24” for all groupers.
- **Remove minimum size limit??** Has been suggested numerous times during Visioning to reduce discards...
- **Adjust size limit for each sector separately?**

Action 10. Adjustment to recreational bag limit of black sea bass

Alternative 1 (No action). Do not adjust the recreational bag limit for black sea bass. The recreational bag limit of black sea bass is 5 fish per person per day.

Alternative 2. Increase the recreational bag limit of black sea bass to 6 fish per person per day.

Alternative 3. Increase the recreational bag limit of black sea bass to 7 fish per person per day.

Alternative 4. Increase the recreational bag limit of black sea bass to 8 fish per person per day.

Alternative 5. Increase the recreational bag limit of black sea bass to 9 fish per person per day.

Alternative 6. Increase the recreational bag limit of black sea bass to 10 fish per person per day.

Note to IPT: Insert a table with recreational landings by trip and % reduction (if any) to evaluate appropriate alternatives for a bag limit.

Others??