

Regulatory Amendment 35

Snapper Grouper Release Mortality Reduction and Red Snapper Catch Levels

Advisory Panel Discussion Document

October 2022

NOTE: This document will be updated with additional information prior to the October 2022 Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meeting.

Background

Red snapper have been in a rebuilding plan since 2011, with the stock expected to be rebuilt by 2044. The most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic red snapper, SEDAR 73 (2021) with data through 2019, determined the stock to still be overfished and undergoing overfishing, but rebuilding (**Figure 1**). The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) notified the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) of the stock status on July 23, 2021. Stock assessment summary information, a history of management, and the most recent fishery performance report for red snapper can be found in its [Fishery Overview](#).

Directed red snapper fishing is limited to a few days of recreational harvest allowed annually and a low annual catch limit (ACL) for the commercial sector with a season beginning each year in July until the ACL is met. These measures, combined with growing fishing effort in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery, particularly from the recreational sector, have led to a drastic increase in the number of red snapper that must be released after being caught while fishing for other snapper grouper species. The increase in releases has, in turn, led to an increase in the number of fish that die after being caught and released, despite efforts from management and fishermen to improve survival after release through best practices and the use of descending devices. The number of dead red snapper releases far outnumbers fish removed from the population by harvest. Large numbers of releases limit the Council's ability to prevent overfishing and reduce the number of fish that can be landed by the fishery.

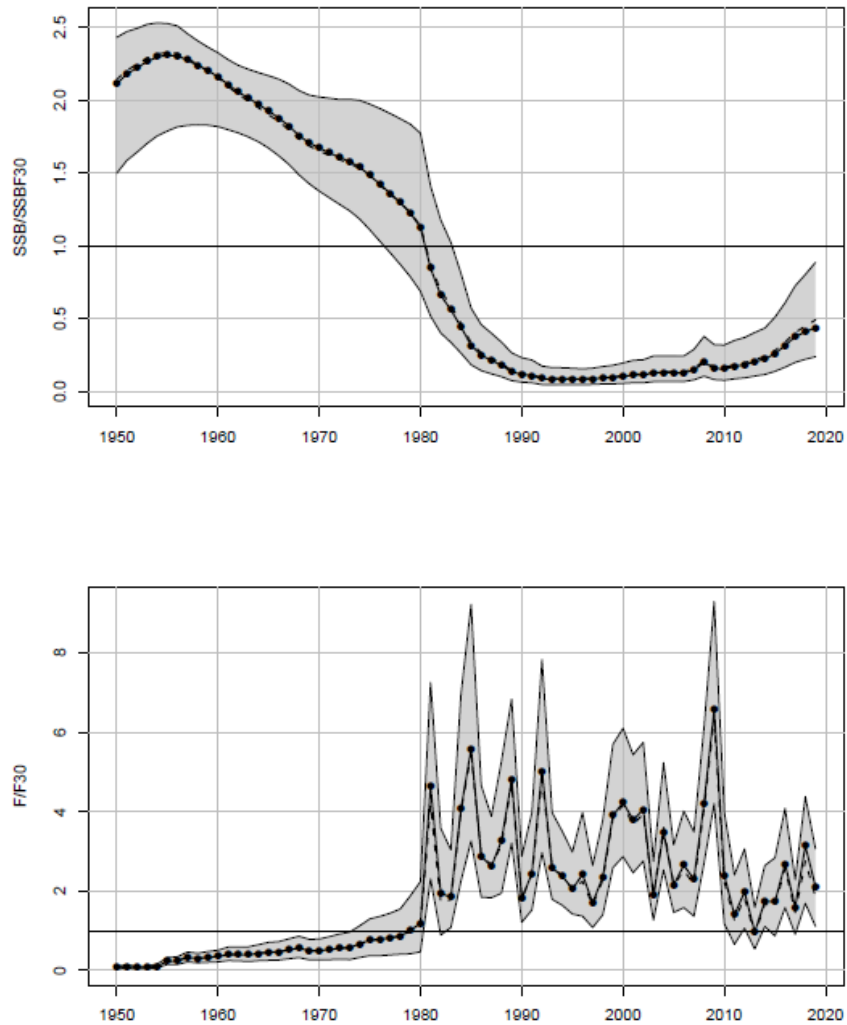


Figure 1. Estimated time series of spawning stock biomass (SSB) and fishing mortality (F) relative to benchmarks. Solid line indicates estimates from base run of the Beaufort Assessment Model; dashed lines represent median values; gray error bands indicate 5th and 95th percentiles of the ensemble modeling. Top panel: SSB relative to $SSB_{F30\%}$; if less than 1, stock is overfished. Bottom panel: F relative to $F_{30\%}$; if > 1 stock is undergoing overfishing. *Source: SEDAR 73 (2021).*

In September 2021, the Council’s (SSC) recommended new acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels for red snapper based on the results of SEDAR 73 (2021). Implementation of the recommended ABCs would initially entail an approximate one-half reduction from the current ABC (53,000 fish), further limiting the fishery and not addressing the primary source of mortality for the stock (dead releases). Therefore, in March 2022, the Council initiated a regulatory amendment that would: 1) adjust red snapper catch levels to be based on the most recent stock assessment and SSC recommendation, and 2) end overfishing of red snapper through management measures aimed at reducing releases and release mortality of snapper grouper species.

In June 2022, the Council directed that, in addition to including consideration of new catch levels for red snapper, the amendment include actions to prohibit the use of electric- or hydraulic-powered rod and reel gear and more than one hook per line for the recreational sector while fishing for snapper grouper species. The Council also directed that overfishing of red snapper be addressed through expanded outreach and education on best fishing practices. The Council also requested analyses of snapper-grouper catches and releases by sector, time of year, and area, as well as additional analyses that were compiled for the September 2022 Council Meeting, and can be accessed [HERE](#).

In September 2022, the Council revised its timeline for Regulatory Amendment 35, scheduling consideration for final Council approval to occur in March 2023. Therefore, the amendment will be considered for approval for public hearings at the Council’s December 2022 meeting.

Tentative Regulatory Amendment Timing

September 2022	Review options paper and provide guidance to staff
December 2022	Review draft amendment, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings
January-February 2023	Conduct public hearings
March 2023	Review final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review
Mid-2023	Regulations effective (TBD if by July fishing season)

Objective for this meeting

Provide input for Council consideration in developing Regulatory Amendment 35.

Proposed Actions

Action 1. Revise the South Atlantic red snapper acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, annual optimum yield, and sector annual catch limits

Alternative 1 (No Action).

- Current Acceptable Biological Catch: 53,000 fish
- Total Annual Catch Limit (ACL): 42,510 fish
- Recreational ACL: 29,656 fish
- Commercial ACL: 124,815 pounds whole weight (lbs ww)

Alternative 2.

Fishing Year	Acceptable Biological Catch (numbers of fish)	Annual Optimum Yield (numbers of fish)	Total Annual Catch Limit (ACL) (numbers of fish)
2023	28,000	28,000	28,000
2024	31,000	31,000	31,000
2025	33,000	33,000	33,000
2026	35,000	35,000	35,000
2027+	36,000	36,000	36,000

Alternative 3.

Fishing Year	Acceptable Biological Catch (numbers of fish)	Annual Optimum Yield (numbers of fish)	Total Annual Catch Limit (ACL) (numbers of fish)
2023	28,000	26,600	26,600
2024	31,000	29,450	29,450
2025	33,000	31,350	31,350
2026	35,000	33,250	33,250
2027+	36,000	34,200	34,200

Alternative 4.

Fishing Year	Acceptable Biological Catch (numbers of fish)	Annual Optimum Yield (numbers of fish)	Total Annual Catch Limit (ACL) (numbers of fish)
2023	28,000	25,200	25,200
2024	31,000	27,900	27,900
2025	33,000	29,700	29,700
2026	35,000	31,500	31,500
2027+	36,000	32,400	32,400

Alternative 5.

- Acceptable Biological Catch: Same as Alternatives 2-4
- Total Annual Catch Limit (and Annual Optimum Yield): 0 fish
 - No harvest or possession of red snapper from the South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone
 - No harvest or possession of red snapper for federally permitted vessels (commercial or for-hire), regardless of where the fish was caught (i.e., federal or state waters).

Discussion

- **Total ACL is 42,510 fish.** (Amendment 43, 2017)
- The commercial ACL is 28.07% of the total ACL poundage, and the recreational ACL is 71.93% of the total ACL.
 - While changes to sector allocation percentages are not being considered at this time, the average weights used to convert between numbers and pounds will be updated to reflect SEDAR 73 (2021).
- **Commercial ACL is 124,815 pounds whole weight (lbs ww).**
 - To calculate the commercial ACL, the total ACL in numbers of fish is converted to weight using the projected average weight for 2018 (10.46 lbs ww) from SEDAR 41 (2017).
- **Recreational ACL is 29,656 fish.**
 - To calculate the recreational ACL, the commercial ACL in lbs ww is converted to numbers of fish using the average weight of commercially caught red snapper from 2012 to 2014 (9.71 lbs ww) (SEDAR 41, 2017).
 - The recreational ACL is the difference between the total ACL in numbers of fish and the commercial ACL in numbers of fish.

AP Discussion:

- What should the Council's preferred alternative be?

Action 2. Prohibit the use of electric- or hydraulic-powered rod and reel for the snapper grouper recreational sector

Alternative 1 (No Action). Electric- or hydraulic-powered rod and reel may be used by the recreational sector to fish for snapper grouper species.

Alternative 2. Prohibit the use of electric- or hydraulic-powered rod and reel by the recreational sector to fish for snapper grouper species.

COUNCIL DIRECTED EXPLORATION OF ADDITIONAL ALTERNATIVES WITH CONSIDERATION OF REGULATIONS BEING SPECIFIC TO AREAS BASED ON GEOGRAPHY, DEPTH, AND SPECIES/CATCH DISTRIBUTIONS

THIS SECTION WILL BE UPDATED WITH DRAFT ALTERNATIVES ADDRESSING THE COUNCIL'S DIRECTION

Discussion

- Objectives:
 1. Reduce recreational dead releases for the snapper grouper fishery.
 2. Contribute to ending overfishing of red snapper.
- Council has directed the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) to explore additional options for Actions 2 and 3 with the goal of maximizing efficiency in ending overfishing of red snapper, while minimizing interference with fishing activities for other species.
- The Council has discussed the potential of exceptions for individuals with physical disabilities. Such exceptions must be made as filed in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

AP Discussion:

- For what areas, components, or target species in the snapper grouper recreational fishery are electric- or hydraulic-powered rod and reel used?
 - Provide any description of how prominent this gear is in those areas or components of the fishery.
- Should a prohibition of electric- or hydraulic-powered rod and reel gear for the snapper grouper recreational fishery be implemented throughout the region?
 - In what area(s) and/or depth(s) should this regulation be implemented to effectively limit dead releases of species managed under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan?
 - Consider prominence of use, differences in catch rates of species that cannot be retained, depth and likelihood of release mortality, etc.
 - Are there areas or components of the fishery where this regulation would be expected to have little or no effect on catches of fish that cannot be retained?

Action 3. Prohibit the use of more than one hook per line for the snapper grouper recreational sector

Alternative 1 (No Action). More than one hook per line may be used by the recreational sector while fishing for snapper grouper species.

Alternative 2. Prohibit the use of more than one hook per line for the recreational sector while fishing for snapper grouper species.

COUNCIL DIRECTED EXPLORATION OF ADDITIONAL ALTERNATIVES WITH CONSIDERATION OF REGULATIONS BEING SPECIFIC TO AREAS BASED ON GEOGRAPHY, DEPTH, AND SPECIES/CATCH DISTRIBUTIONS

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Discussion

- Objectives:
 1. Reduce recreational dead releases for the snapper grouper fishery.
 2. Contribute to ending overfishing of red snapper.
- Council has directed the IPT to explore additional options for Actions 2 and 3 with the goal of maximizing efficiency in ending overfishing of red snapper, while minimizing interference with fishing activities for other species.
- Council staff is conducting a study comparing catch rates between single hook and double hook rigs. FWC also has single-hook/double-hook data that will be investigated to determine how these datasets can be used together to characterize efficiency differences between single and double-hook rigs.

AP Discussion:

- For what areas, components, or target species in the snapper grouper recreational fishery are lines with more than one hook used?
 - Provide any description of how prominent the use of multi-hook rigs is in those areas or components of the fishery.
- Should a prohibition of more than one hook per line for the snapper grouper recreational fishery be implemented throughout the region?
 - In what area(s) and/or depth(s) should this regulation be implemented to effectively limit dead releases of species managed under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan?
 - Consider prominence of use, differences in catch rates of species that cannot be retained, depth and likelihood of release mortality, etc.
 - Are there areas or components of the fishery where this regulation would be expected to have little or no effect on catches of fish that cannot be retained?

Best Fishing Practices Appendix

In September 2022, the Council directed that an appendix be added to Regulatory Amendment 35 that would describe ongoing and potentially expanded efforts to increase outreach and education on Best Fishing Practices. While this action is not a regulatory measure, efforts described in this appendix are expected to contribute to reducing dead releases and ending overfishing for several snapper grouper species.

Best Fishing Practices are described and resources are provided on the Council's [Best Fishing Practices Webpage](#).

AP Discussion:

- BASED ON YOUR OBSERVATIONS, HOW PROMINENTLY ARE BEST FISHING PRACTICES USED WHEN FISHING FOR SNAPPER GROUPE SPECIES?
- ARE THERE PARTICULAR AREAS OR USER GROUPS IN THE FISHERY THAT ARE NOT AWARE OF OR ARE NOT TYPICALLY USING BEST FISHING PRACTICES?