

Regulatory Amendment 32 Revise accountability measures for yellowtail snapper

Decision Document

With guidance from the October 2018 Snapper
Grouper Committee Meeting

Background

Regulatory Amendment 32 would revise accountability measures (AMs) for yellowtail snapper to minimize the probability on in-season closures for the commercial sector over the short-term.

The commercial sector for yellowtail snapper met its annual catch limit (ACL) in 2015 and there was an in-season closure of the commercial sector from October 31 to December 31, 2015. In that same year, the recreational sector only harvested 55% of its ACL. The South Atlantic Council began discussing possible management changes for yellowtail snapper in 2015. An amendment (Snapper Grouper Amendment 44) was initiated to consider a mechanism to allow quota sharing between the commercial and recreational sectors or reallocating the total ACL. The amendment was ultimately postponed pending revisions to recreational landings estimates as a result of changes to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Meanwhile, the yellowtail snapper fishing year for both the commercial and recreational sectors was changed from January-December to August-July (Regulatory Amendment 25, SAFMC 2015). The commercial sector for yellowtail snapper met its ACL again in 2017 and the commercial sector was closed from June 3 to July 31, 2017. The recreational sector only harvested 49% of its ACL in 2017. Long-term management measures for yellowtail snapper will continue to be developed through Amendment 44; however, the South Atlantic Council acknowledged the need for short-term measures to alleviate adverse social and economic effects from recent in-season closures and the 2017 hurricanes. Hence, the South Atlantic Council is developing Regulatory Amendment 32 to consider modifying the yellowtail snapper AMs to minimize the probability of

in-season closures for the commercial sector and consequent adverse social and economic effects.

During the June 2018 meeting, the Committee:

- Reviewed an options paper for this amendment.
- Clarified that actions in this amendment are short-term solutions to alleviate the impacts of in-season closures and acknowledged a stock assessment will be completed for yellowtail snapper in the next year or two and modifications to management may also be warranted after the revisions to MRIP recreational landings estimates become available later this year.
- Approved the draft Purpose and Need
- Directed staff to add alternatives to Action 1 that would allow equitable access to both the commercial and recreational sectors.
- Removed Action 2 from consideration. Action 2 would have modified post-season AMs for yellowtail snapper.
- Directed staff to conduct scoping hearings for Regulatory Amendment 32. Scoping hearings were held via webinar on August 15 and 16, 2018.

Actions in this amendment

- **Action 1:** Revise the In-Season Accountability Measures for Yellowtail Snapper

Expected amendment timing

September 2018	Review scoping comments preliminary analyses.
December 2018	Review and approve for formal review (public input during Council meeting)

Summary of Scoping Comments

Scoping hearings were conducted via webinar on August 15 and 16, 2018. Scoping materials (document and presentation) were made available on the Council's website on August 1 and comments were accepted until August 17, 2018. No comments were submitted online and no written comments were received in the mail. Below is a summary of the comments provided (see **Appendix A** for transcript).

One commenter from the Florida Keys stated that the fish house where she operates from had a devastating season last year due to hurricanes and had to shut down during June and July because there was no yellowtail available. She clarified she was not speaking on the fish house's behalf but simply relating facts to illustrate the financial hardship of businesses that depend on yellowtail snapper. She expressed support for Alternative 2.

One commenter from the Florida Keys expressed disappointment over the Councils (South Atlantic and Gulf) pace at addressing the yellowtail snapper allocation issue. He stated reiterated the importance of the yellowtail snapper resource to the Florida Keys economy. He expressed support for combining the South Atlantic and Gulf ACLs for yellowtail snapper but agreed that Alternative 2 would work over the short term.

A third commenter from the Florida Keys also expressed support for Alternative 2 to temporarily alleviate the issue.

Purpose and need statement

Purpose for Action

The purpose of this amendment is to revise accountability measures to minimize the probability of in-season closures for yellowtail snapper.

Need for Action

The need for the amendment is to achieve optimum yield for yellowtail snapper while minimizing, to the extent possible, adverse social and economic effects due to in-season closures.

Proposed Actions and Alternatives

Action 1. Revise the In-season Accountability Measures for Yellowtail Snapper

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current commercial and recreational in-season accountability measures are to close the respective sector if that sector's annual catch limit is met or is projected to be met.

Alternative 2. An in-season closure will not occur for either sector until the total annual catch limit is met or is projected to be met. Close both sectors when the total annual catch limit is met or is projected to be met.

Preferred Alternative 3. An in-season closure will occur for the commercial sector if the commercial annual catch limit has been met and the total catch (commercial and recreational) reaches, or is projected to reach, 80% of the total annual catch limit.

Alternative 4. An in-season closure will occur for the commercial sector if the commercial annual catch limit has been met and the total catch (commercial and recreational) reaches, or is projected to reach, 70% of the total annual catch limit.

Discussion:

- **Alternative 4** would be the most conservative biologically in terms of expected landings, followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 2 (Table 1)**.
- An in-season closure for the commercial sector would be expected in mid-May under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** whereas **Alternative 2** would not result in an in-season closure and combined landings are expected to amount to 93% of the total ACL (**Table 2**).
- **Preferred Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** are expected to result in the commercial sector harvesting its ACL before the end of the season and combined landings (commercial and recreational) reaching 84% and 76% of the total ACL, respectively, resulting in closures for the commercial sector (**Table 2**).
- None of the alternatives considered would result in an in-season closure for the recreational sector (**Table 2**).
- The estimated change in yellowtail snapper landings and estimated change in ex-vessel value for the proposed alternatives relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** are provided in **Table 3**.
- In terms of the anticipated direct positive economic effects, **Alternative 2** is expected to generate the most positive effects followed by **Preferred Alternative 3**, **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, and **Alternative 4**.

Table 1. Projected landings (pounds whole weight (lbs ww)) of yellowtail snapper under proposed alternatives in Action 1. The current recreational ACL is 1,440,990 lbs ww; current commercial ACL is 1,596,510 lbs ww. The combined (total) ACL is 3,037,500 lbs ww.

Alternative	Pounds (whole weight) available for harvest by Rec. Sector	Projected Rec Landings	Pounds (whole weight) available for harvest by Comm Sector	Projected Comm Landings	Projected Total Landings	% Total ACL Landed
No Action	1,440,990	738,194	1,596,510	1,596,510	2,334,704	77%
Alt 2	3,037,500 (Total ACL)	738,194	3,037,500 (Total ACL)	2,078,627	2,816,821	93%
Pref. Alt 3	3,037,500 (Total ACL)	738,194	2,430,000 (80% Total ACL)	1,798,473	2,536,667	84%
Alt 4	3,037,500 (Total ACL)	738,194	2,126,250 (70% Total ACL)	1,578,954	2,317,148	76%

Table 2. Projected South Atlantic yellowtail snapper commercial and recreational closure dates under each proposed alternative in Action 1.

Alternative	Projected Rec Closure Date	Projected Comm Closure Date
Alt 1 (No Action)	No closure	May 14
Alt 2	No closure	No closure
Pref. Alt 3	No closure	June 11
Alt 4	No closure	May 12

Table 3. Estimated change in ex-vessel value for commercial landings of yellowtail snapper relative to Alternative 1 (No Action) for Action 1.

Alternative	Estimated change in commercial landings (lbs gw)	Estimated change in ex-vessel value (2017 dollars)
Alternative 2	434,340	\$1,507,159
Pref. Alternative 3	181,949	\$631,362
Alternative 4	-15,816	-\$54,882

Committee Action:

MOTION: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 3. An in-season closure will occur for the commercial sector if the commercial annual catch limit has been met and the total catch (commercial and recreational) reaches, or is projected to reach, 80% of the total annual catch limit.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ACCEPT RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 1
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: PREPARE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 32 TO BE CONSIDERED FOR
FORMAL REVIEW IN DECEMBER 2018
APPROVED BY COUNCIL