



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Black Sea Bass Management

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, April 2026

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How did we get here?

SEDAR 76	Indicated strong declines in black sea bass over the last ~15 years Much uncertainty about fishing mortality rate and whether/how the stock could be rebuilt to past levels
Oct 2023– June 2025	Several iterations of SSC discussions, projection runs, and Council direction on draft actions and alternatives
June 2024	Approved for scoping
January 22- February 6, 2025	Scoping



How did we get here?

<p>June 2025</p>	<p>SSC provided ABC recommendations, starting in 2027</p> <p>Council directed staff to develop Regulatory Amendment 37 and pause work on Amendment 56 until the SEDAR 76 Update stock assessment is updated, including incorporation of revised MRIP FES catch estimates</p>
<p>December 2025</p>	<p>Council approved Regulatory Amendment 37 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• establish and manage catches to annual catch targets that are approximately 50% of recent catch levels,• establish a spawning season closure for both sectors during February and March,• and reduce the recreational bag limit from 7 fish to 3 fish per person per day



What remains in Amendment 56?

Actions

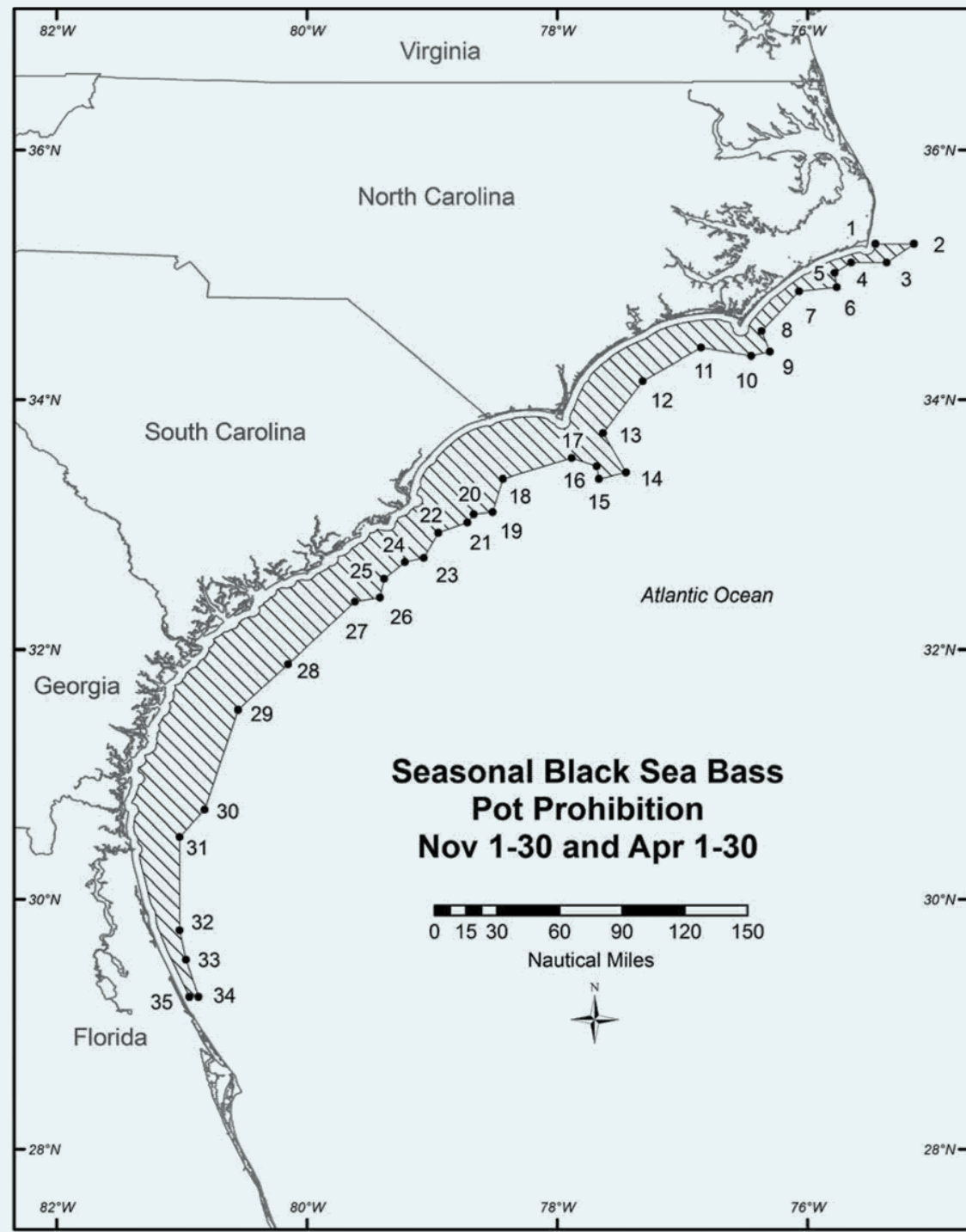
1. Revise status determination criteria for BSB
2. Revise Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limit (ACL), and Optimum Yield (OY) for BSB
3. Change the fishing year start date for BSB
 - Commercial begins on Jan 1; Recreational begins on April 1
 - Consider aligning the start date for both sectors?
4. *Consider re-opening nearshore seasonal closed areas to on-demand gear (Council initiated Reg Am 40 to address this)*

What may be developed in Reg Amendment 40?

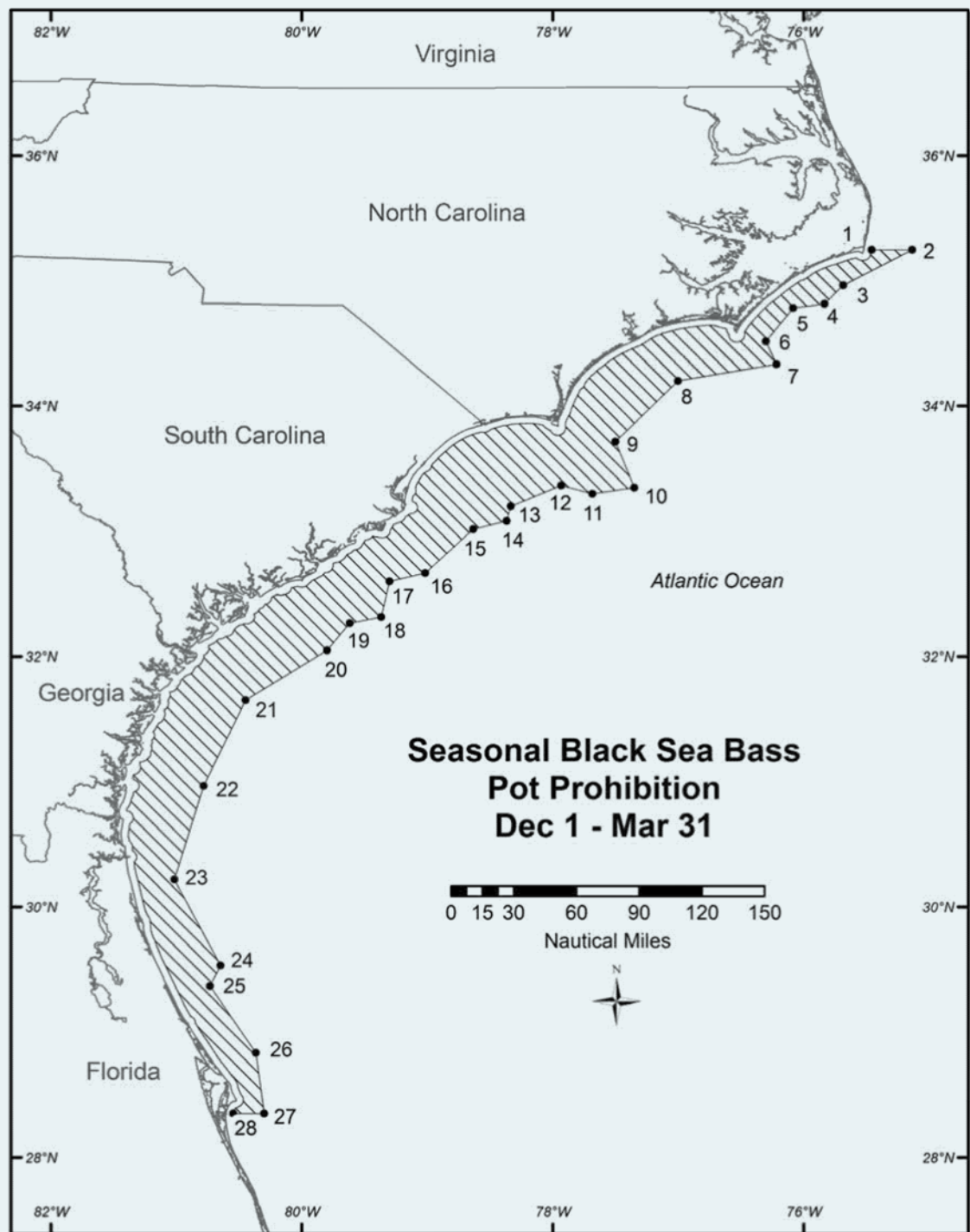


- In March 2026, the Council initiated work on an amendment to consider allowing black sea bass pot equipped with on-demand retrieval systems (on-demand gear) in the nearshore closed areas
- Nearshore areas are closed seasonally to the use of pots to reduce the risk of entanglement to North Atlantic Right Whales.

From November 1 through 30 and from April 1 through 30 each year, the pot closure applies to inshore waters from approximately Daytona Beach, Florida, to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.



From December 1 through March 31, the pot closure applies to inshore waters from approximately Cape Canaveral, Florida, to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.

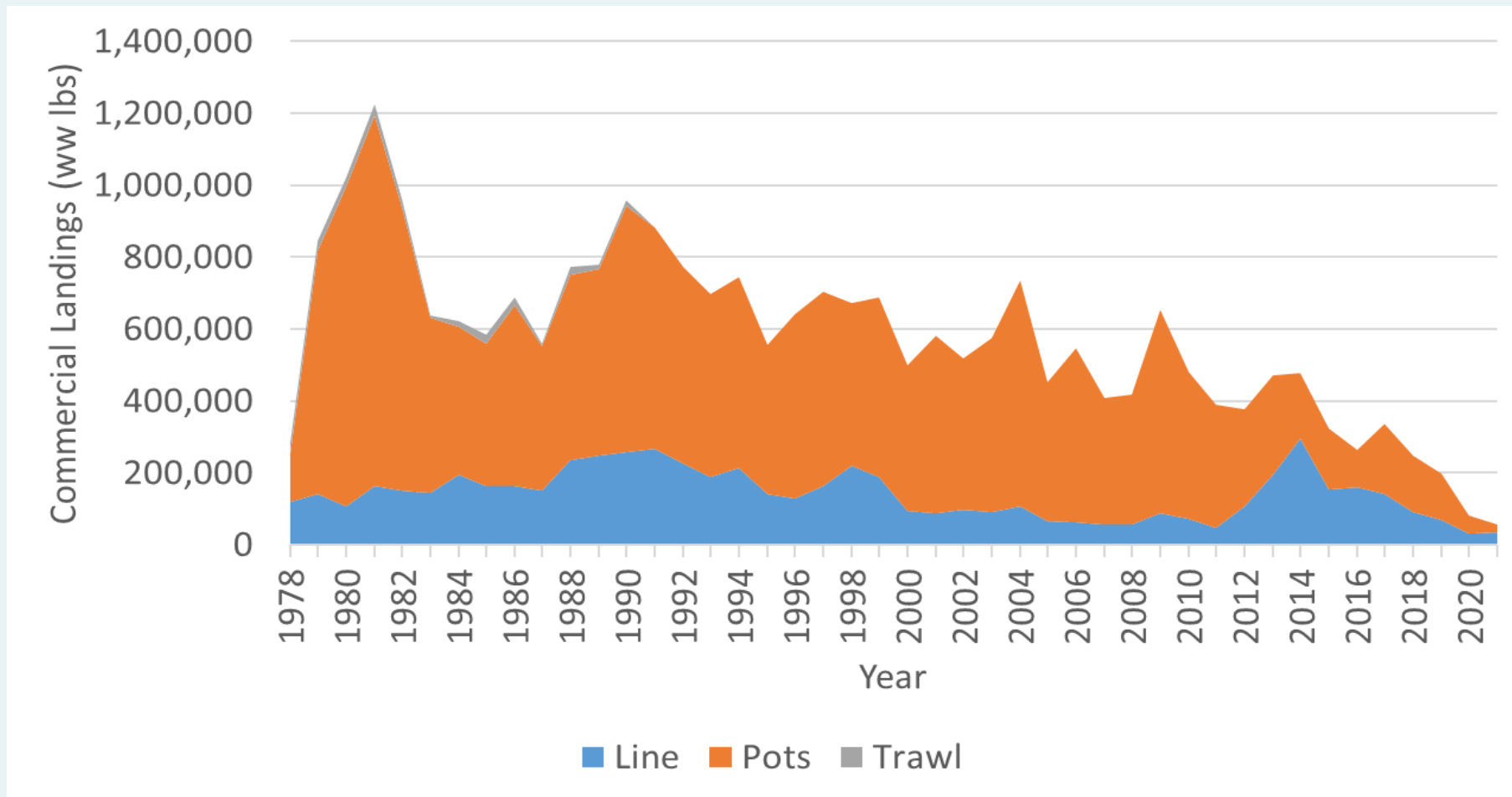


What may be developed in Reg Amendment 40?



- Because Regulatory Amendment 37 would implement a reduction in catch levels and a two-month spawning closure, the Council may also consider a reduction in the trip limit for pots.
- The Council requested information on how the pot fishery including:
 - Landings of pots relative to other commercial gear
 - Pounds landed per trip
 - Seasonality of landings
- Sources: SEDAR 76 for relative landings and logbooks for pounds per trip and seasonality

Commercial Landings by Gear Type, 1978-2024



Source: SEDAR 76 (Table 4)



Pot Landings by Trip, 2005-2024



*=Confidential

Source: Coastal Logbook

What's next?

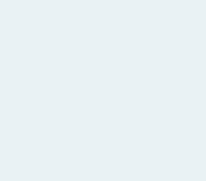


1. Updated recreational catch estimates from MRIP in summer 2026
2. Regulatory Amendment 40 gets developed in 2026
3. Revised stock assessment, including updated recreational catch estimates
4. SSC reviews assessment and recommends catch levels
5. Amendment 56 development starts up again



Observations on 2025 Season

- Council members have heard feedback of notably higher catches of black sea bass in some areas during 2025-early 2026. Have you noticed this in your area?
- Have you noticed any changes in average size?
- Have you noticed a change in the number of 'spots' where you are catching black sea bass?
- Have you noticed changes in the depth range where you caught keeper-sized black sea bass in 2025 relative to earlier years?
- Any other noticeable changes during the 2025 fishing year?



QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION