Amendment 41 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Decision Document

March 2016

Amendment 41 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 41) would address fishing level specifications for mutton snapper in response to the new stock assessment and revise management measures.

Why is the Council Considering Action?

Snapper Grouper Amendment 11 (SAFMC 1999) and the Generic Annual Catch Limits/Accountability Measures Amendment (GMFMC 2011) specified $F_{30\%}$ as a proxy for F_{MSY} and the corresponding yield as a proxy for Maximum Sustainable Yield, and specified the yield at $F_{40\%}$ as a proxy for the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC). The SEDAR 15A (2008) Assessment Workshop panel did not recommend changing any of the management criteria for mutton snapper at that time.

In 2012, the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011) established a jurisdictional allocation between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils for the mutton snapper ABC based on the Florida Keys (Monroe County) jurisdictional boundary between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils: the South Atlantic Council was allocated 82% of the ABC and the Gulf Council received 18% of the ABC (established using 50% of average landings from 1990-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008). The following parameters (pounds whole weight; lbs ww) were implemented for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment:

Parameter	Value
OFL	1,515,300
ABC	926,600
ACL	926,600
Comm ACL	157,707
Rec ACL	768,893
Rec ACT	668,937

The current commercial annual catch limit (ACL) is 157,743 lbs ww and the recreational ACL is 768,857 lbs ww *(NOTE: The commercial allocation in the Comp ACL was 17.02% and the recreational allocation was 82.98%. However the ACLs that were implemented were calculated using this allocation to 6 decimal places instead of 2).*

The Council needs to take action to implement biological benchmarks and fishing levels recommended by the latest stock assessment update. However, **based on improvements to the modeling approach, the 2015 assessment estimated a smaller adult population compared to the 2008 assessment. Because of this finding the assessment recommends a lower acceptable biological catch (ABC) to maintain sustainable harvest.** Consequently, the Council may modify existing management measures for mutton snapper to achieve the desired level of harvest.

The following are the fishing level recommendations from the Council's SSC based on the update to the mutton snapper stock assessment:

Mutton Snapper recommendations from SEDAR 15A Update (2015).

Criteria	Deterministic	Probabilistic
Overfished evaluation	Not overfished: $SSB/SSB_{F30\%}$=1.13	
Overfishing evaluation	Not overfishing: $F/F_{30\%SPR}$=0.65	
MFMT ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	0.18	
$SSB_{30\%SPR}$ (lbs females)	4,649,200	
MSST (lbs females)	4,137,788	
Y at $F_{30\%SPR}$ (MSY proxy, lbs)	912,500	
Y at $F_{40\%SPR}$ (lbs)	874,000	
ABC Control Rule Adjustment		20%
P-Star		30%

OFL RECOMMENDATIONS				
Year	**Landed (lbs)**	**Discards (lbs)**	**Landed (numbers)**	**Discards (numbers)**
2016	713,492	54,005	148,995	29,298
2017	751,711	55,962	164,150	29,660
2018	793,823	56,994	173,656	30,071
2019	835,318	58,170	180,716	30,430
2020	850,077	58,857	184,868	30,780

ABC RECOMMENDATIONS (P* = 0.03)				
Year	**Landed (lbs)**	**Discards (lbs)**	**Landed (numbers)**	**Discards (numbers)**
2016	692,000	52,800	145,400	28,600
2017	717,200	53,700	157,500	28,400
2018	746,800	53,900	164,500	28,300
2019	774,400	54,400	169,300	28,300
2020	798,300	54,500	172,700	28,300

What Actions Are Being Proposed?

Amendment 41 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) proposes to specify the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), minimum stock size threshold (MSST), revise the annual catch limits (ACL), optimum yield (OY), recreational annual catch target (ACT), designate the spawning season for mutton snapper, and modify the recreational bag limit and the commercial trip limit to increase protection of mutton snapper during the spawning season.

Purpose for Action

The *purpose* of this amendment is to update the acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit, maximum sustainable yield, minimum stock size threshold, optimum yield, and revise management measures for the mutton snapper component of the snapper grouper fishery based on the results of the most recent stock assessment utilizing data through 2013.

Need for Action

The *need* for the amendment is to base mutton snapper management measures on the best scientific information available in order to achieve and maintain optimum yield and to prevent overfishing while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. APPROVE THE PROPOSED PURPOSE & NEED STATEMENTS AS PRESENTED BY THE IPT

OPTION 2. MODIFY THE PURPOSE & NEED STATEMENTS (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST CHANGES) AND APPROVE

Possible Actions and Alternatives

Action 1. Specify Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for mutton snapper

Alternative 1 (No Action). The Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic equals the yield produced by F_{MSY}. $F_{30\%SPR}$ is used as the F_{MSY} proxy. The value is not specified.

Alternative 2. Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) equals the yield produced by F_{MSY} or the F_{MSY} proxy. MSY and F_{MSY} are recommended by the most recent SEDAR/SSC.

Alternatives	Equation	F_{MSY}	MSY Values (lbs whole weight)
Alternative 1 (No Action)	MSY equals the yield produced by F_{MSY}. $F_{30\%SPR}$ is used as the F_{MSY} proxy.	$F_{30\%SPR}$	Not specified
Alternative 2	MSY equals the yield produced by F_{MSY} or the F_{MSY} proxy. MSY and F_{MSY} are recommended by the most recent SEDAR/SSC.	$F_{30\%SPR}$	912,500

Discussion:

Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) is the largest long-term average catch that can be taken from a stock under prevailing ecological and environmental conditions. MSY for snapper grouper species was initially specified in Amendment 11 (SAFMC 1998). At that time, MSY was unknown for mutton snapper due to a lack of data. When a stock assessment is conducted; however, the model produces estimates of MSY. The SEDAR 15A (2008) assessment produced an MSY estimate that was not officially adopted by the Council, however. The Council needs to take action to adopt the new definition and value for MSY that resulted from the updated assessment (SEDAR 15A update 2015). Selecting a definition for MSY would allow for subsequent revisions to that value when the stock assessment is updated or a new assessment is performed without the Council having to take action. **Alternative 2** would provide that option.

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE PROPOSED EDITS TO ACTION 1 AS SUGGESTED BY THE IPT

OPTION 2. DO NOT ACCEPT THE PROPOSED EDITS TO ACTION 1 (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST CHANGES AND APPROVE).

OPTION 3. SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 1

Action 2. Specify Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) for mutton snapper

Alternative 1 (No Action). The minimum stock size threshold (MSST) for mutton snapper is MSST = SSB_{MSY} ((1-M) or 0.5, whichever is greater). The value is not specified.

Alternative 2. Minimum stock size threshold (MSST) = 50% of SSB_{MSY}

Alternative 3. Minimum stock size threshold (MSST) = 75% of SSB_{MSY}

Alternatives	MSST Equation	M	MSST Values (lbs whole weight)
1 (No Action)	MSST = SSB_{MSY} ((1-M) or 0.5, whichever is greater).	0.11	Not specified
2	MSST = 50% of SSB_{MSY}	0.17	2,324,600
3	MSST = 75% of SSB_{MSY}	0.17	3,486,900

Discussion:

The SEDAR 15A (2008) assessment produced an MSST estimate that was not officially adopted by the Council hence a value has not yet been specified. The assessment update estimated natural mortality (M) for mutton snapper at 0.17. When the natural mortality rate is low, less than 0.25, even small fluctuations in biomass due to natural variations not related to fishing mortality may cause a stock to vary between an overfished or rebuilt condition. When a species is identified as overfished, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires that a plan be implemented to rebuild the stock. The Council changed the definition for MSST through Regulatory Amendment 21 (effective November 6, 2014) for select snapper grouper species with low natural mortality from MSST = SSB_{MSY}*((1-M) or 0.5, whichever is greater) to MSST = 75% SSB_{MSY}. Other snapper grouper amendments changed MSST to 75% SSB_{MSY} for snowy grouper, golden tilefish, and red grouper (Amendments 15A, 15B, and 24, respectively). The snapper grouper species with low natural mortality rates addressed in Regulatory Amendment 21 were red snapper, blueline tilefish, gag, black grouper, yellowtail snapper, vermilion snapper, red porgy, and greater amberjack. Redefining MSST for these species was done to help prevent unnecessary overfished designations when small drops in biomass are due to natural variation in recruitment or other environmental variables, and ensure that rebuilding plans are applied to stocks when truly appropriate. The estimated natural mortality for mutton snapper from the stock assessment update is within the range of natural mortality values for species addressed in Regulatory Amendment 21 (0.08 – 0.23).

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE PROPOSED EDITS TO ACTION 2 AS SUGGESTED BY THE IPT

OPTION 2. DO NOT ACCEPT THE PROPOSED EDITS TO ACTION 2 (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST CHANGES AND APPROVE).

OPTION 3. SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 2

Action 3. Revise Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and Optimum Yield (OY) for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic region

Alternative 1 (No action). The current ABC and OY for mutton snapper is 926,600 lbs ww. The current commercial ACL is 157,743 lbs ww and the recreational ACL is 768,857 lbs ww. *(NOTE: The commercial allocation in the Comp ACL was 17.02% and the recreational allocation was 82.98%. However the ACLs that were implemented were calculated using this allocation to 6 decimal places instead of 2).*

SUGGESTED WAYS TO STRUCTURE ALTERNATIVES:
A.
Alternative 2. The jurisdictional allocation for the South Atlantic is 82% of the acceptable biological catch (ABC). Specify annual catch limits (ACLs) and optimum yield (OY) for the South Atlantic using the existing sector allocations (17.02% commercial and 82.98% recreational) and specify the recreational ACL in numbers of fish. The ACLs specified for 2020 would remain in place until modified.

Sub-alternative 2a. ACL = OY = ABC.
Sub-alternative 2b. ACL = OY = 95% ABC.
Sub-alternative 2c. ACL = OY = 90% ABC.

B.
Alternative 2. The jurisdictional allocation for the South Atlantic is 82% of the acceptable biological catch (ABC). Specify ACL = OY = ABC. Specify annual catch limits (ACLs) and optimum yield (OY) for the South Atlantic using the existing sector allocations (17.02% commercial and 82.98% recreational) and specify the recreational ACL in numbers of fish. The ACLs specified for 2020 would remain in place until modified.

Alternative 3. The jurisdictional allocation for the South Atlantic is 82% of the acceptable biological catch (ABC). Specify ACL = OY = 95% ABC. Specify annual catch limits (ACLs) and optimum yield (OY) for the South Atlantic using the existing sector allocations (17.02% commercial and 82.98% recreational) and specify the recreational ACL in numbers of fish. The ACLs specified for 2020 would remain in place until modified.

Alternative 4. The jurisdictional allocation for the South Atlantic is 82% of the acceptable biological catch (ABC). Specify ACL = OY = 90% ABC. Specify annual catch limits (ACLs) and optimum yield (OY) for the South Atlantic using the existing sector allocations (17.02% commercial and 82.98% recreational) and specify the recreational ACL in numbers of fish. The ACLs specified for 2020 would remain in place until modified.

Discussion:

Table 1 shows proposed commercial and recreational ACLs for each of the proposed sub-alternatives under **Alternative 2**.

Proposed commercial ACLs for 2016 range from 96,578 to 86,920 lbs ww under **Sub-alternatives 2a** through **2c** (**Table 1**). Average commercial landings from 2010 to 2014 are 76,881 lbs ww (**Table 2**), well below the range of proposed commercial ACLs. If commercial catch rates are similar to those in 2010-2014, it is not expected that the commercial ACL would be landed under any of the proposed alternatives.

Proposed recreational ACLs (in numbers of fish) for 2016 range from 114,010 fish to 102,609 fish whereas the average of recreational landings from 2010-2014 is 112,050 fish (**Table 2**). Hence it is possible that the recreational ACL will be harvested once implemented if harvest rates are comparable to those in 2010-2014. The Council is considering changes to the recreational bag limit to spread out the harvest and prevent a recreational closure.

Table 1. Proposed acceptable biological catch values and annual catch limits for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic based on sub-alternatives 2a through 2c under Action 3. An average weight of 4.13 lbs ww was used to convert the recreational ACL from pounds to numbers of fish.

Year	ABC (SA and Gulf)	SA ABC (lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)	comm ACL (lbs ww)	rec ACL (lbs ww)	rec ACL (numbers)
ACL = OY = ABC (Sub-alternative 2a)						
2015	664,900	545,218	545,218	92,796	452,422	109,545
2016	692,000	567,440	567,440	96,578	470,862	114,010
2017	717,200	588,104	588,104	100,095	488,009	118,162
2018	746,800	612,376	612,376	104,226	508,150	123,039
2019	774,400	635,008	635,008	108,078	526,930	127,586
2020 onwards	798,300	654,606	654,606	111,414	543,192	131,523
ACL = OY = 95% ABC (Sub-alternative 2b)						
2015	664,900	545,218	517,957	88,156	429,801	104,068
2016	692,000	567,440	539,068	91,749	447,319	108,310
2017	717,200	588,104	558,699	95,091	463,608	112,254
2018	746,800	612,376	581,757	99,015	482,742	116,887
2019	774,400	635,008	603,258	102,674	500,583	121,207
2020 onwards	798,300	654,606	621,876	105,843	516,032	124,947
ACL = OY = 90% ABC (Sub-alternative 2c)						
2015	664,900	545,218	490,696	83,516	407,180	98,591
2016	692,000	567,440	510,696	86,920	423,776	102,609
2017	717,200	588,104	529,294	90,086	439,208	106,346
2018	746,800	612,376	551,138	93,804	457,335	110,735
2019	774,400	635,008	571,507	97,271	474,237	114,827
2020 onwards	798,300	654,606	589,145	100,273	488,873	118,371

Source: M. Errigo, SAFMC staff.

Table 2. Commercial and recreational landings of mutton snapper, by sector, for the South Atlantic region, 2010-2014.

South Atl. Mutton Snapper Landings				
Year	Recreational		Commercial	Total
	number	lbs ww	lbs ww	lbs ww
2010	130,249	477,647	74,833	552,480
2011	60,151	251,446	66,160	317,606
2012	86,108	505,583	77,231	582,814
2013	126,241	660,449	75,010	735,459
2014	157,501	538,122	91,173	629,295
Mean	**112,050**	**486,650**	**76,881**	**563,531**

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE PROPOSED EDITS (HIGHLIGHTED) TO ACTION 3 AS SUGGESTED BY THE IPT.

OPTION 2. DO NOT ACCEPT THE PROPOSED EDITS TO ACTION 2 (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST CHANGES AND APPROVE).

OPTION 3. SELECT STRUCTURE A OR B FOR PRESENTING ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 3

OPTION 4. SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 3

Action 4. Revise Recreational Annual Catch Target (ACT) for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic region

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current ACT is 668,906 lbs ww and applies to mutton snapper throughout the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. The ACT = recreational ACL*(1-PSE) or ACL*0.5, whichever is greater, and where Percent Standard Error (PSE) = 13% = average PSE 2005-2009 (for South Atlantic only).

Alternative 2. Revise the annual catch target (ACT) for mutton snapper for the recreational sector and specify the recreational ACT in numbers of fish. The ACT for 2020 would remain in place until modified.

Sub-alternative 2a. ACT = recreational ACL*(1-PSE) or ACL*0.5, whichever is greater.

Sub-alternative 2b. ACT =85% recreational ACL.

Sub-alternative 2c. ACT = 75% recreational ACL.

Year	PSE
2010	10.2
2011	15.2
2012	21.2
2013	15.1
2014	17.9
Average	**15.9**

Note: PSE = Percent Standard Error. The PSE is a measure of precision presented for recreational estimates. The higher the PSE, the less precise the estimate.

NOTE: IPT members have suggested a range of Alternatives 2 through 5 instead of one alternative with sub-alternatives. Alternatives would be structured based on selected structure under Action 3 to maintain consistency.

Discussion:

Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) can be used to prevent ACLs from being exceeded. In managing the snapper grouper fishery, however, Council has chosen not to use ACTs to trigger accountability measures because it is anticipated that improvements in reporting will significantly reduce management uncertainty. **Table 3** shows recreational ACTs for mutton snapper under each of the proposed ACL alternatives from Action 3.

Table 3. Proposed recreational annual catch targets (ACTs) in pounds (lbs ww) and numbers of fish for each of the proposed annual catch limit alternatives under Action 3.

ACL = OY = ABC (Sub-alternative 2a)								
Year	**Total ACL (lbs ww)**	**Rec ACL (lbs ww)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2a)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2a)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2b)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2b)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2c)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2c)**
2016	567,440	470,862	395,995	95,883	400,232	96,908	353,146	85,508
2017	588,104	488,009	410,415	99,374	414,807	100,438	366,007	88,622
2018	612,376	508,150	427,354	103,476	431,927	104,583	381,112	92,279
2019	635,008	526,930	443,148	107,300	447,890	108,448	395,197	95,689
2020 onwards	654,606	543,192	456,825	110,611	461,713	111,795	407,394	98,643

ACL = OY = 95%ABC (Sub-alternative 2b)								
Year	**Total ACL (lbs ww)**	**Rec ACL (lbs ww)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2a)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2a)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2b)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2b)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2c)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2c)**
2016	539,068	447,319	376,195	91,088	380,221	92,063	335,489	81,232
2017	558,699	463,608	389,895	94,406	394,067	95,416	347,706	84,190
2018	581,757	482,742	405,986	98,302	410,331	99,354	362,057	87,665
2019	603,258	500,583	420,990	101,935	425,496	103,026	375,437	90,905
2020 onwards	621,876	516,032	433,983	105,081	438,628	106,205	387,024	93,710

ACL = OY = 90%ABC (Sub-alternative 2c)								
Year	**Total ACL (lbs ww)**	**Rec ACL (lbs ww)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2a)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2a)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2b)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2b)**	**Rec ACT (lbs ww) (2c)**	**Rec ACT (#s) (2c)**
2016	510,696	423,776	360,209	87,218	360,209	87,218	317,832	76,957
2017	529,294	439,208	373,327	90,394	373,327	90,394	329,406	79,759
2018	551,138	457,335	388,734	94,124	388,734	94,124	343,001	83,051
2019	571,507	474,237	403,101	97,603	403,101	97,603	355,678	86,121
2020 onwards	589,145	488,873	415,542	100,615	415,542	100,615	366,655	88,778

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE PROPOSED EDITS (HIGHLIGHTED) TO ACTION 4 AS SUGGESTED BY THE IPT.

OPTION 2. DO NOT ACCEPT THE PROPOSED EDITS TO ACTION 4 (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST CHANGES AND APPROVE).

OPTION 3. SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 4

Action 5. Designate spawning season during which commercial and recreational management measures for mutton snapper should apply

Alternative 1 (No Action). The spawning season for mutton snapper is designated as May-June.

Alternative 2. For regulatory purposes, designate the following as "spawning months". The remainder of the year would be the "regular season."

Sub-alternative 2a. April-June
Sub-alternative 2b. April-July
Sub-alternative 2c. June-July
Sub-alternative 2d. May-July
Sub-alternative 2e. May-August

NOTE: AS APPROVED IN DECEMBER 2015, ACTION 5 ADDRESSED MODIFICATION TO THE RECREATIONAL BAG LIMIT: "*MOTION: APPROVE INCLUSION OF ACTION 5, AS MODIFIED, IN AMENDMENT 41 AND APPROVE THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 5 FOR DETAILED ANALYSIS. COUNCIL STAFF TO COORDINATE WITH FWC STAFF REGARDING SPAWNING SEASON OPTIONS (ADDITIONAL ACTION).*" THE IPT IS SUGGESTING THE ACTION TO DESIGNATE THE SPAWNING SEASON BE ACTION 5 AND THE ACTION TO MODIFY BAG LIMIT(S) BE ACTION 6.

NOTE: Council member suggested using single months under sub-alternatives above so Council could choose multiple preferreds.

NOTE: IPT members have suggested a range of Alternatives 2 through 6 instead of one alternative with sub-alternatives. Alternatives would be structured based on selected structure under Action 3 to maintain consistency.

Discussion:

Amendment 4 (SAFMC 1991) designated May and June as the spawning months for mutton snapper and established regulations to prevent overharvesting of spawning aggregations. In recent years, however, fishermen and law enforcement personnel have approached the Council with concerns about overexploitation of mutton snapper while they are aggregated to spawn. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) has received similar comments since 2007. FWC staff has regularly heard comments about reducing recreational bag limits and commercial trip limits. Stakeholders are particularly concerned about how many mutton snapper are harvested during the spawning season. Hence, the Council is coordinating with FWC to implement compatible regulations for mutton snapper in state and federal waters that would address stakeholder concerns and benefit the mutton snapper resource. A necessary step to achieving compatible regulations is to designate the time frame during which more restrictive regulations would apply, i.e., the "spawning months" vs. "regular season."

Mutton snapper are known to form aggregations when they spawn (Figuerola et al. 1997). Burton et al. (2005 and references therein) indicate that mutton snapper spawning occurs from May through July at Riley's Hump and peaks in June, as indicated by gonadosomatic indices (M. Burton, unpubl. data). Fish begin to aggregate for spawning around the full moon (Burton et al

2005). Individuals have been observed in spawning condition in the U.S. Caribbean from February through July (Erdman 1976). Some spawning occurs during February to June off Puerto Rico, but spawning peaks during the week following the full moon in April and May. Spawning aggregations are known to occur north of St. Thomas, USVI, and south of St. Croix, USVI, in March, April, and May (Rielinger 1999).

Graham et al. (2008) report evidence of a significant decline in catch-per-unit effort, mean landings and inter-annual median lengths of mutton snapper in Belize, due to overexploitation at a spawning aggregation in Gladden Spit. The authors suggest that "a precautionary approach to spawning aggregation management is warranted that provides full protection from fishing to enhance population persistence. The findings also highlight the need for substantially greater enforcement and long-term fisheries monitoring under a comprehensive regional management strategy."

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. APPROVE INCLUSION OF ACTION 5, AS MODIFIED, IN AMENDMENT 41.

OPTION 2. PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON STRUCTURE OF ALTERNATIVE(S)/SUB-ALTERNATIVES(S) UNDER ACTION 5

OPTION 3. SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE(S)

Action 6. Modify Mutton Snapper Recreational Bag Limit in the South Atlantic

Alternative 1 (No Action). Mutton snapper is part of the aggregate 10 snapper bag limit in the South Atlantic. In the South Atlantic, the 10 snapper-per-person aggregate includes all snapper species in the snapper grouper management unit except red snapper and vermilion snapper. Cubera snapper less than 30 inches total length (TL) are included in the 10 fish bag limit. The aggregate 10 snapper bag limit includes a maximum of 2 cubera snapper per person (not to exceed 2 per/vessel) for fish 30 inches TL or larger off Florida. Note: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and the State of Florida regulations include mutton snapper in the 10 snapper bag limit.

Alternative 2. Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit in the South Atlantic, but specify a bag limit for mutton snapper during the "regular season" (i.e., non-spawning months)

Sub-alternative 2a. ~~10~~ 4 fish/person/day
Sub-alternative 2b. 5 fish/person/day
Sub-alternative 2c. ~~4~~ 10 fish/person/day

Alternative 3. Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit in the South Atlantic, but specify bag/vessel limits for mutton snapper during the "spawning months"

Sub-alternative 3a. 2 fish/person/day
Sub-alternative 3b. 2 fish/vessel/day
Sub-alternative 3c. 5 fish/vessel/day
Sub-alternative 3d. 10 fish/vessel/day
Sub-alternative 3e. 12 fish/vessel/day

Alternative 4. Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit in the South Atlantic, but specify bag limits for mutton snapper within the aggregate bag limit year round.

Sub-alternative 4a. 2 fish/person/day.
Sub-alternative 4b. 3 fish/person/day.
Sub-alternative 4c. 5 fish/person/day.

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS TO ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 6.

OPTION 2. MODIFY/DO NOT MODIFY THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES/SUB-ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 6

OPTION 3. SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE(S)/SUB-ALTERNATIVE(S) UNDER ACTION 6

Discussion:

As mentioned previously, there is stakeholder concern about fishing effort on mutton snapper spawning aggregations despite the healthy status of the mutton snapper stock. In 2010, the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) recommended that the South Atlantic Council consider a spawning area closure or a seasonal closure in May and June of each year. Furthermore, the AP recommended that the mutton snapper bag limit be reduced to 3 fish per person per day. The most recent stock assessment of mutton snapper in the southeastern United States (SEDAR 15A Update 2015) indicated that mutton snapper are neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. Currently, mutton snapper is part of the 10 snapper aggregate (gray snapper, mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, Cubera snapper, queen snapper, blackfin snapper, silk snapper, dog snapper, lane snapper, and mahogany snapper). NOTE: Amendment 35 (pending approval) proposes to remove dog snapper and mahogany snapper from the snapper grouper fishery management unit). Current management measures for mutton snapper in federal waters of the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico and state waters of Florida are shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Current recreational mutton snapper fishing regulations in State waters off Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, and the South Atlantic (June 2015).

Species	Regulations	State Waters Gulf and South Atlantic	Federal Waters Gulf of Mexico	Federal Waters South Atlantic
Mutton Snapper	Size Limit	16" TL		
	Bag Limit	10 snapper aggregate (per person/day)		
	Season	Year round		

Table 5 below shows landings of mutton snapper by recreational wave for 2012 and 2013. The peak of mutton snapper recreational landings occurred during the May-June spawning season (Wave 3) in the South Atlantic during 2012 and 2013. **Figure 1** shows the distribution of mutton snapper catch-per-angler for the private and charter modes (based on the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey, MRFSS) and headboat (based on the Southeast Headboat Survey) of mutton snapper for various time periods. Between 2011 and 2013, most anglers caught three or fewer mutton snapper.

Table 5. South Atlantic recreational (private, charter, and headboat) mutton snapper landings by wave.

Year	1 (J/F)	2 (M/A)	3 (M/J)	4 (J/A)	5 (S/O)	6 (N/D)	Total
2012	46,282	102,210	182,880	77,015	27,275	34,366	470,028
2013	50,961	36,208	175,774	91,913	90,689	36,186	481,731

Source: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/acl_monitoring/index.html.

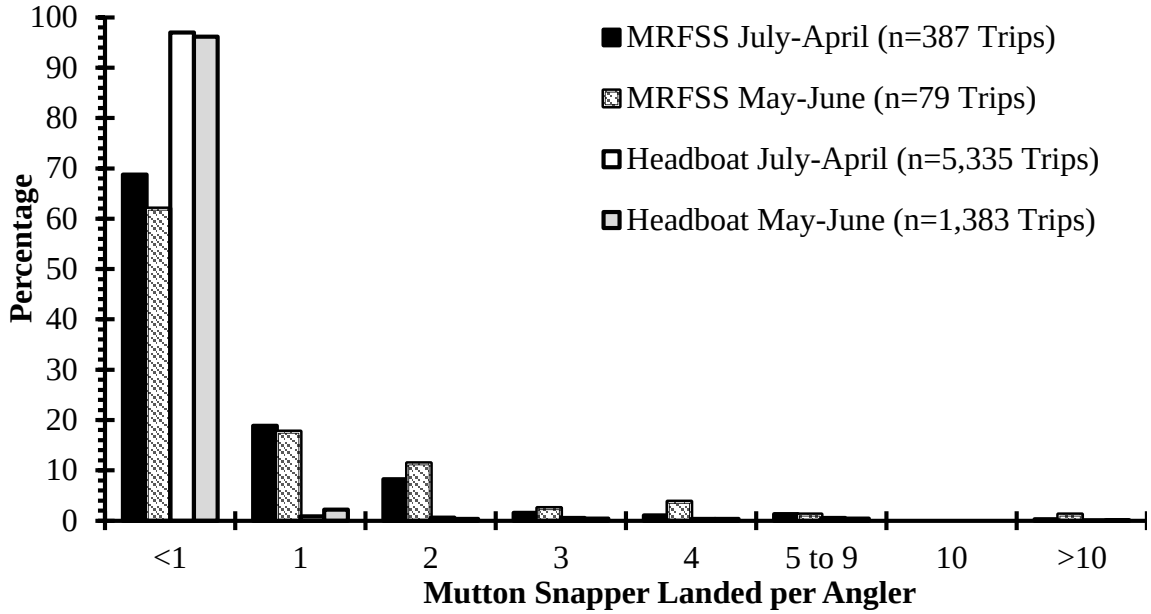

Figure 1. Distribution of South Atlantic mutton snapper landed per angler by season from the two recreational datasets (MRIP and Headboat) from 2011 to 2013. The regular season is from July to August and the spawning season is from May to June.

Estimated percent reductions in recreational landings for private recreational, charter, and headboat are shown in **Table 6**. The reductions were calculated in terms of mutton snapper numbers with respect to dataset (MRIP and headboat) and non-spawning (July to April) and spawning (May-June) seasons.

Table 6. Percent reductions in landings for various bag limits generated from South Atlantic recreational landings for the years 2011-2013.

Bag Limit	MRIP			Headboat		
	Jul-Apr	May-Jun	All Year	Jul-Apr	May-Jun	All Year
10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
9	0.2	1.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3
8	0.4	2.5	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.7
7	1.3	3.8	1.8	1.3	2.0	1.5
6	2.3	5.1	2.9	2.9	3.8	3.1
5	3.5	6.3	4.1	5.5	6.2	5.7
4	5.1	8.4	5.8	9.4	9.7	9.5
3	8.5	12.7	9.3	15.3	14.7	15.2
2	14.1	20.3	15.3	25.0	21.7	24.2
1	29.3	34.2	30.3	37.5	32.4	36.3

Action 7. Modify Mutton Snapper Commercial Trip Limit in the South Atlantic

Alternative 1 (No Action). During ~~the spawning season~~ (May-June) the commercial sector in the South Atlantic is restricted to 10 mutton snapper per day or 10 mutton snapper per trip, whichever is more restrictive, and sale is allowed. There is no bag or trip limit for the commercial sector in the Gulf or South Atlantic from July through April.

Alternative 2. Establish a commercial trip limit for mutton snapper during the "regular season" (i.e., non-spawning months) in the South Atlantic.

Sub-alternative 2a. 300 lbs ww
Sub-alternative 2b. 400 lbs ww
Sub-alternative 2c. 500 lbs ww

Alternative 3. Specify a commercial trip limit for mutton snapper during the "spawning months" in the South Atlantic.

Sub-alternative 3a. 2 fish/person/day
Sub-alternative 3b. 5 fish/person/day
Sub-alternative 3c. 2 fish/vessel/day
Sub-alternative 3d. 5 fish/vessel/day
Sub-alternative 3e. 10 fish/vessel/day
Sub-alternative 3f. 12 fish/vessel/day

NOTE: GUIDANCE FROM DECEMBER WAS TO STRUCTURE ALTERANTIVES UNDER ACTION 7 TO RESEMBLE THOSE UNDER ACTION 6

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS TO ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 7.

OPTION 2. MODIFY/DO NOT MODIFY THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES/SUB-ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 7

OPTION 3. SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE(S)/SUB-ALTERNATIVE(S) UNDER ACTION 7

Discussion:

This action considers alternatives for mutton snapper commercial trip limits in the South Atlantic during the "regular season" (i.e., non-spawning months) and during the "spawning season". Current commercial fishing regulations for mutton snapper are detailed in **Table 7**. During May and June, the commercial sector in the South Atlantic is restricted to 10 mutton snapper per day or 10 mutton snapper per trip, whichever is more restrictive, and sale is allowed. There is no bag or trip limit for the commercial sector in the Gulf or South Atlantic during the July-April regular season.

Table 7. Current commercial mutton snapper fishing regulations in State waters off Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, and the South Atlantic (June 2015).

Species	Regulations	State Waters Gulf and South Atlantic	Federal Waters Gulf of Mexico	Federal Waters South Atlantic
Mutton Snapper	Size Limit	16" TL		
	Trip Limit	None		
	Closed Season	None		
	Bag Limit	May-June: Restricted to 10 fish/person/day or trip	None	May-June: Restricted to 10 fish/person/day or trip

Table 8 shows commercial landings of mutton snapper by gear type from 2004-2013 in the South Atlantic. The predominant gear for harvesting mutton snapper in South Atlantic waters has been vertical line gear (**Table 8**). Trap gear was phased out in the Gulf in 2007; however, trap landings of mutton snapper are still reported in the South Atlantic and are likely bycatch from the spiny lobster fishery (Matthews et al. 2005).

Table 8. Commercial landings of mutton snapper by gear in the South Atlantic for 2004-2013. Landings are reported in pounds whole weight. Confidential landings are labeled as "NA".

Year	Vertical	Traps	Diving	Other
2004	98,513	6,225	3,805	709
2005	81,551	2,662	5,023	2,436
2006	59,071	3,427	2,959	608
2007	59,955	5,918	3,770	1,343
2008	61,836	2,296	3,052	829
2009	69,088	1,873	3,429	915
2010	66,464	4,048	2,759	822
2011	54,997	7,111	3,599	372
2012	66,912	3,875	6,156	NA
2013	60,586	3,321	8,865	NA

Source: Commercial ACL dataset. South Atlantic vertical line includes: hook-and-line by hand, hook-and-line power assisted (bandit) and hook-and-line troll. "Other" includes landings from the following gears: gill nets, lift nets, seine nets, and unclassified gear.

The commercial landings of mutton snapper for all Florida counties are highest during the May-June peak spawning period (**Figure 2**) despite the current restriction on harvest to 10-fish/person/day or trip, whichever is more restrictive. An examination of the monthly distribution of mutton snapper landings from commercial logbook and dealer reports shows similar trends (**Table 9**). Overall Florida landings of mutton snapper were highest in 2008, decreased through 2011, and increased again in 2012 and 2013 (**Figure 3**).

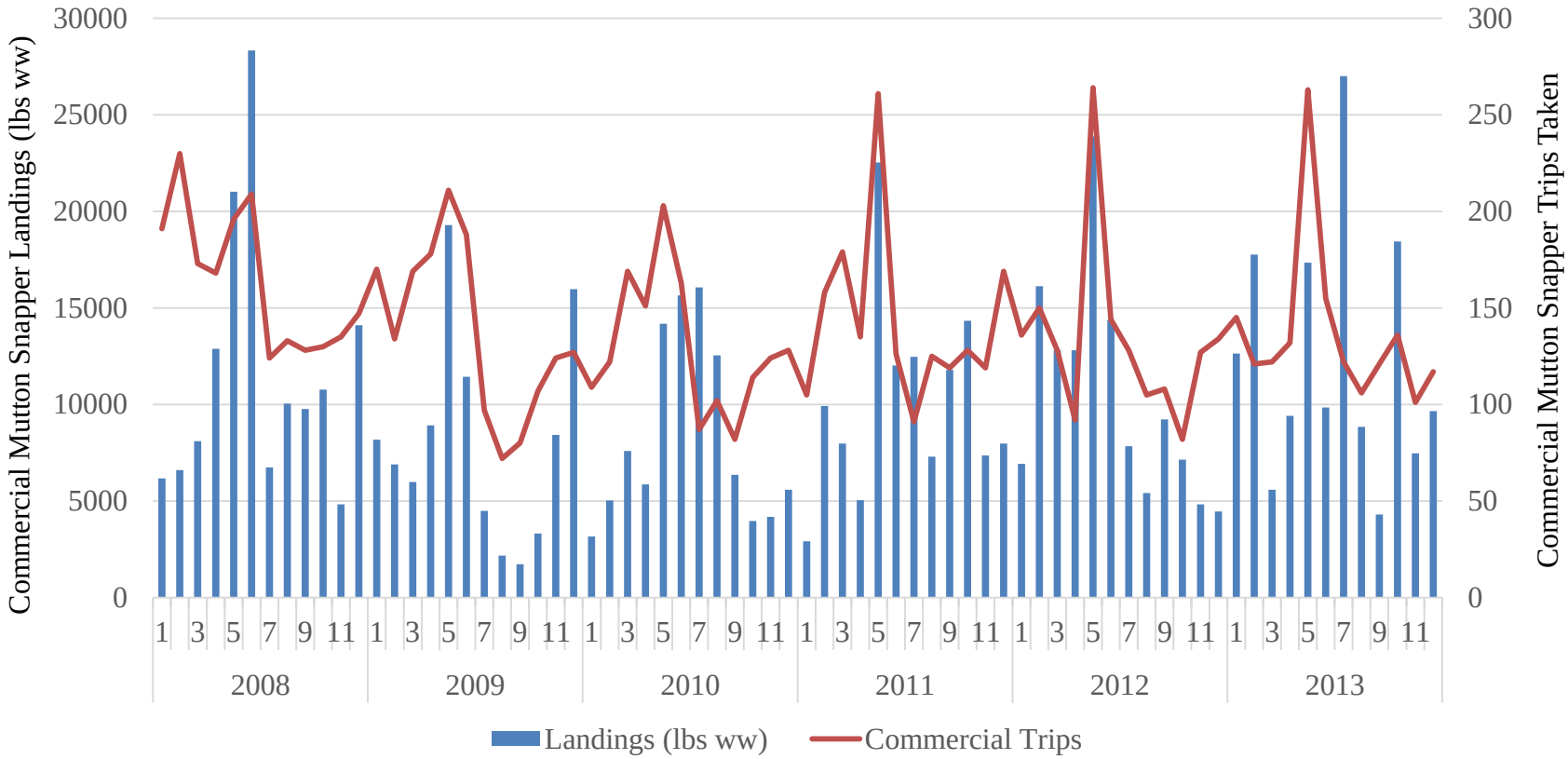

Figure 2. Commercial mutton snapper landings and trips by month from 2008 to 2013. Left y-axis (blue bars) is total commercial mutton snapper landings (lbs ww) for all Florida counties. Right y-axis (red line) is total commercial mutton snapper trips taken.

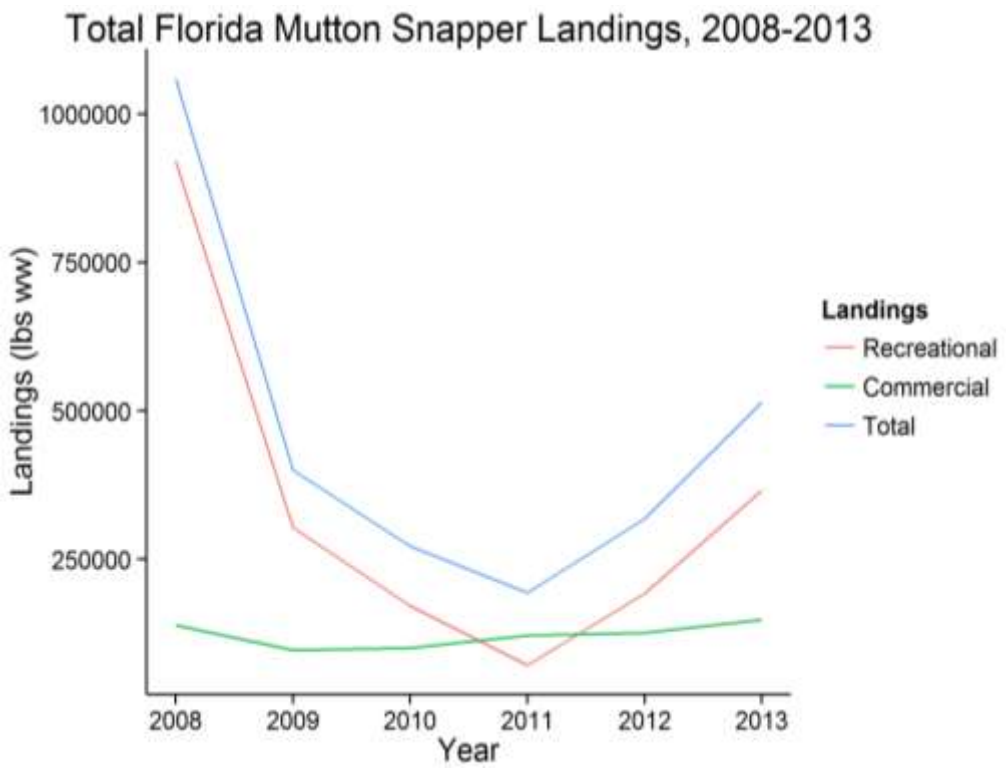

Figure 3. Total landings of mutton snapper in Florida (lbs ww). Data are from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recreational landings and commercial trip ticket programs.

Table 9. Monthly distribution of mutton snapper landings from commercial logbook in the South Atlantic during 2009-2013.

Month	Percent of landings (Dealer reports)	Percent of landings (Logbook)
1	5.7%	5.5%
2	6.8%	6.5%
3	5.5%	5.6%
4	6.5%	6.1%
5	**20.8%**	**22.6%**
6	**14.7%**	**14.0%**
7	9.0%	9.8%
8	8.3%	8.3%
9	5.3%	5.5%
10	5.5%	5.4%
11	6.0 %	5.6%
12	5.9%	5.1%