

Red Snapper

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Overview Document

October 2021

Background

The red snapper stock in the South Atlantic was first assessed through the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process in 2009. SEDAR 15 (2009) determined the stock to be overfished and undergoing overfishing.

History of Red Snapper Stock Status

Assessment	Overfished	Overfishing
SEDAR 15 (2009)	X	X
SEDAR 24 (2010)	X	X
SEDAR 41 (2017)	X	X
SEDAR 73 (2021)	X	X

In response to SEDAR 15, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) implemented a moratorium on the harvest of red snapper through Amendment 17A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) (SAFMC 2010). Amendment 17A also established a plan to rebuild the South Atlantic red snapper stock by 2044. Another stock assessment (SEDAR 24) was conducted in 2010, which found the stock to be overfished and undergoing overfishing. In 2013, a method to annually evaluate whether a limited red snapper season could occur, based on red snapper removals in the previous year relative to the acceptable biological catch (ABC), was developed and implemented through Amendment 28 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2013).

The South Atlantic red snapper stock was assessed again through SEDAR 41 (2017) and found to still be overfished and undergoing overfishing. However, based on new scientific information presented to the Council, a limited harvest of red snapper was allowed in 2017 through emergency action pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

In 2018, the Council changed the process for annually determining whether a season would occur based on landings relative to the ABC that was developed in Amendment 28. In Amendment 43 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2018), the Council determined that a limited harvest of red snapper would be allowed by implementing a total annual catch limit (ACL) of 42,510 fish, based on the landings observed during the limited red snapper season in 2014. That ACL was less than the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) total ABC recommendation of 53,000 red snapper. Under the total ACL specified in Amendment 43, and based upon the Council's sector allocation (28.07% commercial and 71.93% recreational), the commercial ACL equals 124,815 pounds (whole weight) and the recreational ACL equals 29,656 fish. On an annual basis, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) determines the length of the recreational fishing season based on these catch levels and catch rates from the previous year.

The most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic red snapper, SEDAR 73 (2021) with data through 2019, determined the stock to be overfished and undergoing overfishing (Figure 1). The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed results of the assessment at their April and July 2021 meetings, and recommended a new overfishing limit (OFL) and ABC (summarized below).

The Council received notification from NMFS (via letter dated July 23, 2021) of the status of the red snapper stock in the South Atlantic. Following notification that a stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished, the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Council to develop an FMP amendment with actions that end overfishing immediately and rebuild the affected stock. Since a rebuilding plan is already in place and SEDAR 73 (2021) shows progress towards rebuilding is being made, the Council can continue working through its current rebuilding plan but is still required to take action to end overfishing.

At the September 2021 meeting, the Council determined that with the high number of red snapper removals attributable to discarding, which exceeds removals due to landings by several times, ending overfishing of the red snapper stock requires action to reduce discards and discard mortality throughout the snapper grouper fishery. The Council directed staff to begin work on short-term and long-term amendments primarily focused on reduction of discards and restructuring management of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery to be more holistic.

This document provides summaries of the SSC's catch level recommendations following SEDAR 73 (2021) and current management measures for red snapper. The objective of this document is to provide information that can be used in future discussions of management for red snapper and the snapper grouper fishery as a whole. An application providing an overview of the fishery, including management history, landings, and assessment information, has been developed and can be found here: https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/SA_FisheryDataRedSnapper/.

Acceptable Biological Catch and Overfishing Limit

The SSC reviewed the South Atlantic red snapper stock assessment (SEDAR 73 2021) at their April 2021 and July 2021 meetings. The SSC found that the assessment addressed the terms of reference appropriately, was conducted using the best scientific information available, was adequate for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations and addressed uncertainty consistent with expectations and available information.

The SSC reviewed projections depicting a variety of recruitment, fishing mortality, and discard mortality scenarios. The SSC recommended the OFL be based on results of a projection that included recent (last 10 years) average recruitment, a discard mortality rate that accounts for descender device usage based on current and predicted levels of use, a fishing mortality rate of F30% (the fishing mortality rate when the spawning potential ratio equals 30%; a proxy for F_{MSY}), and no reallocation of fishing mortality from discards to landings. This projection was run out through 2044 to determine if the stock rebuilt within the rebuilding timeframe. The projections indicated the stock would rebuild. Recommended landings and projected discard levels are provided for the next 5 years (**Table 1**).

The current total ABC for South Atlantic red snapper is 53,000 fish and the total ACL is 42,510 fish (Amendment 43, SAFMC 2018).

Table 1. South Atlantic red snapper OFL/ABC recommendations (SEDAR 73 2021). The SSC recommended that ABC=OFL. OFL/ABC recommendations are based on landed catch and are bolded.

Year	Landings (numbers of fish)	Discards (numbers of fish)	Landings (lbs ww)	Discards (lbs ww)
2022	25,000	195,000	284,000	983,000
2023	28,000	202,000	327,000	1,036,000
2024	31,000	207,000	368,000	1,076,000
2025	33,000	210,000	408,000	1,104,000
2026	35,000	211,000	446,000	1,122,000

Current Regulations and Accountability Measures

- Current commercial regulations:
 - Trip limit of 75 pounds gutted weight and no minimum size limit.
 - The commercial fishing season begins on the second Monday in July. The commercial red snapper season closes when the commercial sector ACL is met or projected to be met. The NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator has the authority to delay the opening of red snapper fishing seasons in the event of a tropical storm or hurricane affecting the Council's area of authority.
 - Gear requirements:
 - Descending device and dehooking tool required on board.
 - Non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks required for hook-and-line north of 28°N. Non-stainless steel hooks required for hook-and-line south of 28°N.
 - Sea turtle release gear required.
 - Species must be landed with head and fins intact.
- Commercial accountability measures (AM):
 - The commercial ACL for red snapper is 124,815 lb (56,615 kg), round weight... NMFS will monitor commercial landings during the season, and if commercial landings, as estimated by the Science and Research Director (SRD), reach or are projected to reach the commercial ACL, the Assistant Administrator (AA) will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the commercial sector for red snapper for the remainder of the year. On and after the effective date of the closure notification, all sale or purchase of red snapper is prohibited and harvest or possession of red snapper is limited to the recreational bag and possession limits and only during such time as harvest by the recreational sector is allowed... This bag and possession limit and the prohibition on sale/purchase apply in the South Atlantic on board a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested or possessed, **i.e.**, in state or Federal waters.
- Current recreational regulations:
 - Bag limit of 1 fish per person per day and no minimum size limit.
 - Each year, NMFS announces the length of the recreational fishing season. The recreational fishing season (weekends) begins on the first Friday in July. The end of the recreational red snapper season is projected and announced before the start of the recreational season. The NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator has the authority to delay the opening of red snapper fishing seasons in the event of a tropical storm or hurricane affecting the Council's area of authority.
 - Gear requirements:
 - Descending device and dehooking tool required on board.

- Non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks required for hook-and-line and natural baits north of 28°N. Non-stainless steel hooks required for hook-and-line and natural baits south of 28°N.
 - Sea turtle release gear required (for-hire only).
- Species must be landed with head and fins intact.
- Recreational bag limit sales prohibited.
- Recreational AMs:
 - The recreational ACL for red snapper is 29,656 fish. The AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to announce the length of the recreational fishing season for the current fishing year. The length of the recreational fishing season for red snapper serves as the in-season accountability measure. On and after the effective date of the recreational closure notification, the bag and possession limits for red snapper are zero.