



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Amendment 60

*Commercial Permits and Trip Efficiency
Scoping Document*

Online Scoping

Scoping information, including this document and a video presentation, will be posted on the Council's website. Clarifying questions about the posted materials can be directed to Mike Schmidtke at Mike.Schmidtke@safmc.net. Comments can be submitted online, by mail, or by fax, using the information at the end of this document.

Amendment 60 Webpage

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Background

In June 2024, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) established the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) to focus on revising policies to improve the commercial snapper grouper fishery. Following the Sub-Committee's recommendations, the Council has initiated Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP) with two main objectives: 1) address issues related to the Commercial Snapper Grouper Unlimited (SG 1) Permit, and 2) increase commercial trip efficiency.



SG 1 (Unlimited) Permits

Permits were first required in the snapper grouper fishery via Amendment 4 to the FMP, which became effective in 1992. Each permit is issued to a vessel. In 1998, Amendment 8 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established the 2-for-1 method of limiting snapper grouper permit holders. The 2-for-1 policy applied to SG 1 permits only and specified new entrants must acquire two existing individual SG 1 permits to be issued a valid SG 1 permit for their vessel. In doing so, one of the existing permits would be permanently “retired” and no longer available. Once a single SG 1 permit is acquired, the permit holder has one year from the expiration date of that first permit to acquire another SG 1 permit to enter the fishery.

Prior to Amendment 8, there were concerns over excess capacity and intense competition over the snapper grouper resource among recreational and commercial participants. A 1997 socio-demographic study (Rhodes, Backman, and Hawkins) indicated that license limitation was the preferred approach among active commercial fishermen to address these concerns.

The objectives of Amendment 8 aimed to:

- Prevent overfishing,
- Provide a mechanism to vest participants,



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- Promote stability,
- Create market-driven harvest pace,
- Minimize gear and area conflicts,
- Decrease incentive for overcapitalization,
- Prevent continual dissipation of returns, and
- Evaluate and minimize local depletion.

In Amendment 8, the Council stated their intent that the 2-for-1 permit requirement would apply until the optimum level of vessels in the fishery was reached. Once data became available to determine this level and the fishery reached such level, the Snapper Grouper FMP would be amended to drop the 2-for-1 provision.

The amendment did not specify a method to determine the optimum level of vessels, but comments from the public and commercial fishermen on the Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel have prompted several Council discussions since 2018 about whether the 2-for-1 policy should continue. Many of these comments express difficulties for new entrance into the fishery due to the limited number of permits and high costs associated with acquiring



permits. Additionally, comments have discussed the need for younger participants due to the aging of the commercial snapper grouper fleet.

Within Amendment 60, the Council intends to consider whether the 2-for-1 policy should change but is not considering a change to the limited entry nature of the commercial snapper grouper fishery.

Commercial Trip Efficiency

Along with addressing potential changes to the SG 1 permit, the Council is also considering management changes to make commercial trips more efficient. Several potential efficiency improvements were identified during the initial Sub-Committee meeting in 2024, and discussion of these topics was further emphasized after issuance of Executive Order 14276 – Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness – in April 2025. Trip efficiency actions that could be considered include: 1) dynamic trip limits (higher/lower at different times of year depending on harvest rates), 2) allowing multi-day trip limits for a subset



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of snapper grouper species, 3) allowing some harvest of incidentally caught species that are out of season, and 4) revising gear stowage requirements to enable multi-gear and multi-fishery trips.

What is scoping?

Scoping is an early step in the development of an amendment, in which the Council solicits public input on what actions and alternatives should (or should not) be considered in an amendment. Amendment actions are typically developed with several alternatives (e.g. Action: Consider changing the trip limit. Alternatives: 1) keep the current 100-pound limit, 2) increase to a 120-pound trip limit, or 3) reduce to an 80-pound trip limit). Comments on why an action or alternative is or is not necessary are also critical to inform the Council of the fishery's needs.

Later in the process, during the public comment period, the Council will again solicit public input on which of the considered alternatives should be selected as preferred.

Why is the Council considering taking action?

The Council initiated discussions that led to this amendment in response to comments from the commercial fishery stakeholders and the Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel. While specific actions being considered in this amendment are not statutory requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the Council believes these actions would improve the productivity and effectiveness of commercial snapper grouper harvest in the South Atlantic, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act National Standards and Executive Order 14276.

What actions are initially being considered?

1. Revise the 2-for-1 snapper grouper commercial unlimited (SG 1) permit policy
 - If the 2-for-1 policy is removed, the Council may need to revise the requirements to acquire or retain an SG 1 permit through a separate action or sub-action



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2. Establish a framework for dynamic trip limits that vary throughout the season, based on the tracked catch and the time remaining in the season.
 - The Council's intent is for this to be a general policy, applicable to many snapper grouper species.
 - The goal of this policy is to maximize the commercial sector's ability to harvest its allocation of optimum yield, while allowing year-round access to the fishery.
 - The Council has discussed consideration of an alternative that begins the season with a higher trip limit, followed by a trip limit decrease (step down), if necessary.
 - The Council has also discussed an alternative that begins the season with a lower trip limit, followed by a trip limit increase (step up), if possible.
 - Annual catch limits are set as sustainable levels of catch, even within a rebuilding plan. Therefore, this policy could be applied to rebuilding species, as well.
3. Establish multi-day trip limits for a subset of snapper grouper species
 - This action would consider allowing trips that last more than one day to retain more than one trip limit. The increased trip limit may not necessarily correspond to the number of days (e.g., maximum of 2 trip limits even if a trip lasts for 3 days).
 - This action may apply only to a subset of snapper grouper species, given potential species-specific population or management concerns.
4. Establish an incidental or out-of-season allowance for harvest.
 - If such an allowance occurs, out-of-season catches would need to be estimated when monitoring in-season landings or establishing annual seasons (i.e., seasons may be shortened to allow out-of-season harvest to occur and not exceed the ACL).
 - The Council has discussed potential enforcement difficulties and regulatory confusion for stakeholders in knowing how much of each species is allowed at different times of year, particularly for species fished under separate annual catch and trip limits for multiple gear types (e.g., golden tilefish).
 - To ensure this catch remains 'incidental' rather than targeted, an alternative could require harvest of in-season species to retain the 'incidental' allowance.



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- One approach could be establishment of 2 different trip limits: directed and incidental, which would be applicable at different times of the fishing year.
 - Another approach could be an aggregate incidental limit, possibly with a total poundage for a specified sub-group of allowable species.
5. Revise existing stowage requirements for gear on board.
- This would not be an expansion of the gear being allowed for fishing; just changing how gears can be legally stowed on a vessel, potentially enabling fishermen to switch gears/fisheries within the same trip.

Potential Amendment timing

Timing	Council Action
June 2025	Review initial actions and consider approval for scoping
July 25-August 8, 2025	Scoping
September 2025	Review scoping comments; provide direction for actions and alternatives
December 2025	Review available analyses and draft action and alternative language
March 2026	Consider approval for public hearings
Spring 2026	Public hearings
June 2026	Review public comment and approve all actions
September 2026	Final Council approval
Summer 2027	Regulations effective



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What are your thoughts? The Council wants to hear from you!

The Council wants to hear from you on the proposed changes. The following questions are not prescriptive but may be a helpful tool to organize ideas for comments.

SG 1 Permits

1. What are the benefits and barriers that you have experienced due to the SG 1 permit 2-for-1 policy?
2. How would keeping or removing the 2-for-1 policy affect fishing operations for your area?
3. If the 2-for-1 policy is removed, should there be any new requirements to acquire or retain an SG 1 permit?

Commercial Trip Efficiency

4. Are current trip limits limiting your harvests? At what point within a trip, do you begin to reduce your effort to avoid going over a trip limit (e.g., when you've caught 90% of the limit)?
5. Would the commercial snapper grouper fishery benefit more from a higher trip limit (followed by a step-down, as necessary) or a lower trip limit (followed by a step-up, if possible) at the beginning of the fishing season?
6. In considering an amount of incidental/out-of-season harvest, should the Council develop a general policy that would be applied on a species-specific basis or an overall (i.e., multispecies) incidental poundage limit?
7. If gear stowage requirements were changed, would you fish more for a wider variety of species or with multiple types of gear within the same trip?



How Do I Comment?

Comments must be received by **5:00 PM on Friday, August 8, 2025**. There are several ways that you can submit your comment to the Council including:

Written comments

Written comments may be read and submitted on Amendment 60 using the online public comment form at the following links:

[Submit Comment](#)

[Read Public Comments](#)

Comments by mail

Send comments to: John Carmichael, Executive Director,
SAFMC. 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201. N. Charleston,
SC 29405

Comments by fax

843-769-4520