

SAFMC OPTIONS PAPER

Regulatory Amendment 14 to the Fishery Management Plan of the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region



January 2013

Background

Regulatory Amendment 14 to the Fishery Management Plan of the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Regulatory Amendment 14) was initially intended to address management of five species within the snapper grouper fishery management unit. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) identified additional management measures regarding greater amberjack, mutton snapper, gray triggerfish, black sea bass, and vermilion snapper at the Council meeting in June 2012. The Council provided further guidance on actions and alternatives to include in the amendment at their September and December 2012 meetings. That guidance included moving some of the actions pertaining to the management of vermilion snapper to a different amendment (Regulatory Amendment 18), remove actions pertaining to gray triggerfish until after the stock assessment for that species is completed in 2013, and remove actions addressing red porgy in light of the stock assessment update results for that species.

Actions in Regulatory Amendment 14

1. Modify the fishing year for greater amberjack
2. Reduce the trip limit for greater amberjack
3. Implement additional regulations to protect mutton snapper during the spawning season
4. Change the measurement method for gray triggerfish to have consistency between state and federal waters.
5. Increase the minimum size limit for hogfish
6. Revise the ACL (including sector ACLs), OY, and ACT for black sea bass
7. Modify the fishing year for the for black sea bass recreational sector
8. Modify the fishing year for the black sea bass commercial sector
9. Modify the recreational bag limit for vermilion snapper
10. Modify the aggregate grouper bag limit
11. Modify the AM for the commercial sector for gag
12. Revise the AMs for vermilion snapper?
13. Revise the AMs for red porgy?

Proposed Timeline for 2013

1. The IPT will develop an Options Paper and present it to the South Atlantic Council at the March 2013 meeting. Actions and alternatives will be based on the South Atlantic Council's guidance in September and December 2012.
2. The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) will review the draft amendment in April 2013 and provide their input for the South Atlantic Council's consideration.
3. The South Atlantic Council will review the draft amendment at the South Atlantic Council meeting in June 2013, provide further guidance, and approve for public hearings.
4. Public hearings will be held in August 2013.
5. The South Atlantic Council will review public input and approve the amendment for formal review at their September or December 2013 meeting.

I. Greater amberjack

Management Background

Amendment 4 (1991); regulations effective Jan 1, 1992 -- defined overfishing/overfished and established rebuilding timeframe for greater amberjack ≤ 10 years (year 1 = 1991); established 28 inch fork length (FL) limit (recreational only) and 3 greater amberjack bag limit; established 36 inch FL or 28 inch core length – greater amberjack (commercial only); spawning season closure – commercial harvest greater amberjack > 3 fish bag limit prohibited in April south of Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Amendment 9 (1998); regulations effective Feb 24, 1999 -- 1 fish recreational bag limit; no harvest or possession $>$ bag limit, and no purchase or sale during April; quota = 1,169,931 pounds gutted weight (gw); began fishing year May 1; prohibited coring.

Amendment 9 (resubmitted); regulations effective Oct 13, 2000 -- commercial trip limit of 1,000 pounds gw for greater amberjack.

Regulatory Amendment 9 (2010); regulations effective July 15, 2011 – increased commercial trip limit to 1,200 pounds gw. The South Atlantic Council considered the alternatives below:

Alternative 2. Change the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack.

Sub-Alternative 2a. Increase the greater amberjack commercial trip limit to 2,000 pounds gw.

Sub-Alternative 2b. Increase the greater amberjack commercial trip limit to 1,500 pounds gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c (Preferred). Increase the greater amberjack commercial trip limit to 1,200 pounds gw.

Alternatives Considered but Rejected:

- Change the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to 2,000 pounds gw (2,080 pounds whole weigh (ww)) for vessels making multi-day trips north of Cape Canaveral, Florida. For all other trips the 1,000 pounds gw trip limit would apply.
- Change the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to 2,500 pounds gw (2,600 pounds ww) for vessels making multi-day trips north of Cape Canaveral, FL. For all other trips the 1,000 pounds gw trip limit would apply.

Rationale: The South Atlantic Council was concerned that enforcing the proposed trip limits in Alternatives 3 and 4 would not be feasible because vessels could easily traverse back and forth to points north and south of the Cape Canaveral, Florida boundary.

Comprehensive ACL Amendment (2011); regulations effective April 16, 2012 – ABC = 1,968,000 pounds ww.

Allocations = 40.66% commercial; 59.34% recreational.

*Commercial annual catch limit (ACL) = 800,163 pounds ww.

Recreational ACL = 1,167,837 pounds ww.

Recreational annual catch target (ACT) = 992,662 pounds ww.

In-season and post-season accountability measures (AMs):

Commercial - If the commercial sector ACL is met or projected to be met, all purchase and sale is prohibited and harvest and/or possession is limited to the bag limit. If the commercial sector ACL is exceeded, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the commercial sector ACL in the following season by the amount of the overage only if the species is overfished.

Recreational - If the recreational sector ACL is exceeded, the following year's landings would be monitored in-season for persistence in increased landings. The Regional Administrator will publish a notice to reduce the length of the fishing season as necessary.

*A Supplemental Final Rule was issued by NOAA Fisheries published in the *Federal Register* on July 18, 2012, (effective August 17, 2012), to implement the greater amberjack commercial ACL. The latter was inadvertently left out of the Comprehensive ACL Amendment Final Rule that was effective on April 16, 2012. In the Supplemental Final Rule NOAA Fisheries notes: *preliminary greater amberjack commercial landings data for the 2011–2012 fishing year indicate that commercial landings may have exceeded the revised commercial quota being implemented through this rule, and might have triggered a closure had this rule been in place for the 2011–2012 fishing year. However, the Council cannot set the ACL at a level that exceeds the ABC. NMFS will monitor commercial landings for the 2012–2013 fishing year, and subsequent years, to determine if the AM will be triggered and the commercial sector should be closed in-season.*

Current status/issues:

- Greater amberjack is on Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) schedule for 2014.
- Prior to implementation of the Comprehensive ACL Amendment and Regulatory Amendment 9, the commercial quota was 1,169,931 pounds gw and trip limit was 1,000 pounds gw. The Comprehensive ACL Amendment decreased the commercial quota and Regulatory Amendment 9 increased the commercial trip limit.
- A few fishermen in the Florida Keys have requested the South Atlantic Council consider changing the start date of the fishing year from May 1 to Jan 1. They claim that greater amberjack migrate out of the Florida Keys by mid-May. Also, it is important that the month of March remain open because it is prior to Lent and is also a very productive month for fishing.
- Some fishermen have commented that the current trip limit (1,200 pounds gw) is economically profitable and they would not like this trip limit reduced.

Actions under consideration

Action 1. Modify the fishing year for greater amberjack.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current commercial fishing year begins on May 1 and ends on April 30.

Alternative 2. Modify the fishing year for greater amberjack to begin on January 1 and end on December 31.

Alternative 3. Modify the fishing year for greater amberjack to begin on March 1 and end on February 28.

Action 2. Reduce the trip limit for greater amberjack.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current trip limit is 1,200 pounds gutted weight (gw).

Alternative 2. Reduce the commercial trip limit to 1,000 pounds gw.

Preliminary Analysis

Worksheet Name: Greater Amberjack Landings
File compiled on: 9/4/12
File compiled by: Jessica Stephen
File composed of: Greater Amberjack Commercial Landings By Month

Data Caveats: Additional landings for some months were not included as the record comment indicated: REPORTS OF OUT-OF STATE LANDINGS PURCHASED BY FLORIDA DEALERS MAY DUPLICATE REPORTS FROM STATE OF LANDING. As these might be duplicate records, these were not included in the summation of monthly landings.

April 2010 only had one dealer with landings; this was excluded due to confidentiality rules. There were no landings in April of 2011.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Yearly Total
1993	19,781	33,375	8,184	13,211	12,524	6,285	15,470	26,307	34,117	15,706	7,164	7,000	199,124
1994	3,833	2,183	2,018	4,487	8,238	10,020	19,257	23,426	19,296	7,034	4,489	4,402	108,683
1995	2,807	6,070	4,327	5,717	14,664	41,946	20,610	16,566	25,766	10,317	5,238	2,304	156,332
1996	2,754	3,334	4,629	11,120	10,536	25,375	52,052	25,163	29,703	6,881	5,887	6,718	184,152
1997	68,520	63,141	57,852	51,306	113,262	82,430	75,981	74,019	41,460	37,049	37,904	39,212	742,136
1998	13,442	31,658	3,094	1,725	3,616	108,149	75,514	76,744	24,573	37,102	66,359	54,986	496,962
1999	49,614	52,971	5,803	1,180	2,031	69,407	46,950	44,066	22,737	28,078	45,056	38,821	406,714
2000	42,670	49,989	12,827	788	3,846	176,800	165,742	119,760	64,286	61,303	50,759	36,909	785,679
2001	32,948	92,917	6,675	859	2,058	114,028	70,616	88,070	89,083	29,250	34,847	43,934	605,285
2002	36,316	49,060	2,268	1,070	1,486	118,727	121,725	134,935	78,671	60,493	47,737	50,815	703,303
2003	65,841	67,661	6,577	1,720	2,214	132,481	106,175	170,086	123,490	70,504	58,873	50,917	856,539
2004	86,170	117,963	5,827	547	2,797	154,681	138,527	131,339	54,911	65,225	69,341	43,688	871,016
2005	94,312	116,096	5,854	1,846	3,496	104,326	73,923	90,790	36,590	32,981	37,315	64,470	661,999
2006	58,101	89,295	8,078	573	2,108	101,417	77,433	89,964	46,188	24,456	35,429	33,287	566,329
2007	42,487	97,097	12,222	337	780	94,504	62,553	79,257	86,457	28,187	21,653	47,425	572,959
2008	39,184	68,533	4,326	1,517	856	55,919	55,164	27,722	23,121	36,786	62,768	57,064	432,960
2009	59,128	84,054	12,673	367	4,672	78,706	115,505	113,445	61,706	57,073	12,388	1,729	601,446
2010	70,935	86,224	18,628	-	5,316	107,564	51,110	98,048	42,109	49,975	1,969	2,107	533,985
2011	67,806	94,951	4,835	-	6,404	88,647	289	5,058	160,305	76,993	1,885	1,191	508,364

II. Mutton snapper

Management Background

Amendment 4 (1991); regulations effective Jan 1, 1992 -- Established 12 inch TL minimum size limit for mutton snapper; established aggregate snapper bag limit – 10/person/day, excluding vermilion snapper and allowing no more than 2 red snappers; spawning season closure – commercial harvest of mutton snapper greater than the 10/person/day snapper aggregate is prohibited during May and June.

Amendment 7 (1994); regulations effective Jan 1, 1995 -- Increased minimum size limit to 16 inches TL.

Comprehensive ACL Amendment (2011); regulations effective April 16, 2012 – Jurisdictional allocations - South Atlantic = 82% of ABC, Gulf of Mexico = 18% of ABC.

South Atlantic acceptable biological catch (ABC) = 926,600 pounds ww.

Allocations = 17.02% commercial; 82.98% recreational.

Commercial ACL = 157,743 pounds ww.

Recreational ACL = 768,857 pounds ww.

Recreational ACT = 668,937 pounds ww

In-season and post-season AMs:

Commercial - If the commercial sector ACL is met or projected to be met, all purchase and sale is prohibited and harvest and/or possession is limited to the bag limit. If the commercial sector ACL is exceeded, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the commercial sector ACL in the following season by the amount of the overage only if the species is overfished.

Recreational - If the recreational sector ACL is exceeded, the following year's landings would be monitored in-season for persistence in increased landings. The Regional Administrator will publish a notice to reduce the length of the fishing season as necessary.

Current status/issues:

- In 2010, the Snapper Grouper AP made the following recommendation:
- AP RECOMMENDS THE COUNCIL CONSIDER A TRADITIONAL SPAWNING AREA (E.G. WESTERN DRY ROCKS) AND/OR SEASONAL CLOSURE IN MAY AND JUNE (BOTH COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL) TO PROTECT SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS OF MUTTON SNAPPER AND REDUCE THE BAG LIMIT TO 3 FISH PER ANGLER PER DAY
- The South Atlantic Council considered removal of mutton snapper from snapper grouper fishery management unit (FMU) during development of the Comprehensive ACL Amendment.
- Snapper Grouper AP recommended against removal of the species from the FMU.
- The stock of mutton snapper in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico was assessed in 2008 with data through 2006 (SEDAR 15A 2008). The assessment indicated that the mutton snapper stock was not undergoing overfishing and was not overfished in 2006. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute conducted an update to the benchmark assessment in 2012. The assessment will be reviewed in 2013.
- Derby fishing is taking place in Florida Keys on spawning aggregations.
- Fishermen target greater amberjack to obtain roe to use as bait for mutton snapper.
- Fishermen have requested a reduction in the mutton snapper bag limit.

Actions under consideration

Action 3. Implement additional regulations to protect mutton snapper during the spawning season.

Alternative 1. No Action. Do not implement additional regulations to protect mutton snapper during the spawning season. During May and June, commercial snapper-grouper permit holders are limited to a commercial harvest of mutton snapper of 10 fish per person or 10 fish per trip, whichever is more restrictive, which is equivalent to the aggregate snapper recreational bag limit.

Alternative 2. Designate area closures coinciding with known spawning aggregation sites and close them to fishing for mutton snapper during May and June

Sub-Alternative 2a. Designate Western Dry Rocks as a mutton snapper spawning aggregation area closure.

Sub-Alternative 2b. Designate Eyeglass Bar as a mutton snapper spawning aggregation area closure.

Alternative 3. Implement a reduction in the bag limit to 5 mutton snapper per person per day during May and June.

Alternative 4. Implement a reduction in the bag limit to 3 mutton snapper per person per day during May and June.

Alternative 5. Modify the commercial spawning season closure.

Sub-Alternative 5a. All commercial and recreational harvest is prohibited during May and June.

Sub-Alternative 5b. All commercial and recreational harvest is prohibited during April, May, and June.

NOTE: Is this on hold until the Gulf considers these?

Alternative 6. Reduce the bag limit of mutton snapper year-round.

Sub-alternative 6a. Reduce the bag limit of mutton snapper year-round to 3 per person per day (included in the aggregate 10-snapper bag limit).

Sub-alternative 6b. Reduce the bag limit of mutton snapper year-round to 5 per person per day (included in the aggregate 10-snapper bag limit).

Sub-alternative 6c. Reduce the bag limit of mutton snapper year-round to 7 per person per day (included in the aggregate 10-snapper bag limit).

Western Dry Rocks Description

Located about one nautical mile (NM) southwest of Key West in 110 ft. of water (just offshore of 10-fm depth contour on NOAA charts), Western Dry Rocks is a popular dive spot and well-known and greatly exploited mutton snapper spawning aggregation site. The center of the spawning area is located at 24°25.80'N and 81°56.88'W. The mutton snapper fishery there is still active. While many fishermen would like to see a reduced bag limit for mutton snapper, some would like to see this site become a no-take MPA. This area is within Florida State waters (three miles on the Atlantic side) and within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS; boundary is at 300 ft. depth contour).

Western Dry Rocks also includes aggregations of permit, gag, scamp, black grouper and red snapper. An annual spawning aggregation of permit can be found during the months of March and April (24°25.98'N, 81°55.93'W). Aggregations of permit occur slightly (< 1 NM) to the west of the mutton snapper aggregation during the months of March and April (24°25.98'N, 81°55.93'W) and are thought to be spawning aggregations. Black grouper form small aggregations around the same area as the permit, and speared black grouper have appeared to be in spawning condition; however spawning of black grouper has not been observed at this site. It is not known if the aggregations of scamp, gag, or red snapper that also occur at Western Dry Rocks represent spawning aggregations. Indeed, it has not been documented that those species aggregate to spawn anywhere in the lower Keys. Gray snapper also aggregate and are believed to spawn in the same area where black grouper and spawning permit have been observed. Hammerhead and other sharks are commonly seen there.

It is apparent that other reef-fish spawning sites exist in the Florida Keys; however, Western Dry Rocks is a very important one according to fishermen who served on the MPA Expert Workgroup. The latter was assembled in May 2012 to assist the Council with selecting appropriate sites for possible MPA designation to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper.

Western Dry Rocks may be one of the more important spawning sites in the Florida reef tract. The entire Dry Rocks area described could be protected within a polygon as small as 1 by 2 NM. A buffer zone outside of this box would be desirable.

Eyeglass Bar Description

Eyeglass Bar is an area just east of the shipping channel heading south out of Key West. Multiple sources (at least two charter fishermen and a fishery-dependent sampler) have conveyed to Southeast Fisheries Science Center scientists (Chris Taylor & Todd Kellison) that mutton snapper aggregate at that site during spawning moons. SEFSC scientists and FL FWC scientists have visited that site multiple times around predicted spawning moons over the past several years, during which time they have typically observed ~ 5-20 vessels fishing in a relatively tightly grouped area (~ 120-150' depth on the south side of the bar). While no mutton snapper aggregations have been documented using acoustics and diver surveys, scientists have observed fishermen catching what appear to be mutton snapper and have received subsequent reports from charter fishermen of large mutton snapper catches from the site.

Aerial survey-generated vessel count data for the site (and for Western Dry Rocks) is available for several days around predicted spawning moons, for the past several years. Also, in 2010, scientists observed hundreds (perhaps > 1,000) aggregated gray snappers at Eyeglass Bar, in an area immediately shallower than the area that is targeted for muttons (the muttons are targeted off the edge of the bar, which runs generally east-to-west, and the grays were on top of the bar at ~ 75' depth).

Preliminary Bag Limit Analysis

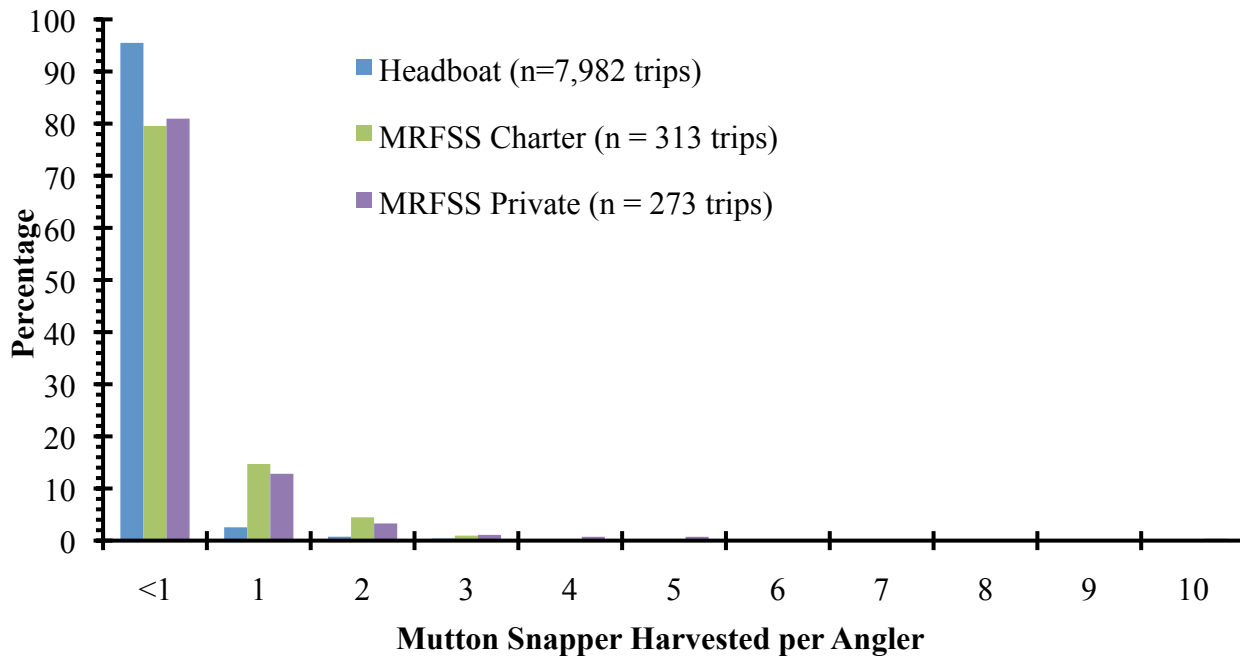


Figure 1. Distribution of South Atlantic mutton snapper harvested per angler from the three recreational datasets (MRFSS and HBS) from 2009 to 2011.

Table 1. Percent reductions in landings for various bag limits applied to South Atlantic recreational landings for the years 2009 to 2011. The reductions were calculated in terms of number of mutton snapper with respect to dataset (MRFSS and HBS). Then the reductions were weighted by each dataset’s contribution to the total landings.

Bag Limit	Year			
	2009	2010	2011	2009-2011
10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
9	0.9	0.0	0.3	0.3
8	1.9	0.0	0.5	0.7
7	2.9	0.1	0.9	1.0
6	4.0	0.2	1.4	1.5
5	5.2	0.8	2.1	2.3
4	8.3	1.9	3.1	3.9
3	11.9	4.8	4.4	6.6
2	17.2	10.5	7.2	11.5
1	29.4	22.1	18.8	23.3

NOTE: Maps of Western Dry Rocks and Eyeglass Bar are being prepared and will be available for the first briefing book.

III. Gray triggerfish and Hogfish

Management Background

Regulatory Amendment 6 (1994); regulations effective May 22, 1995 -- Established 12-inch TL minimum size limit off Florida for gray triggerfish.

Amendment 9 (1998); regulations effective Feb 24, 1999 -- All snapper grouper species without a bag limit: aggregate recreational bag limit 20 fish/person/day, excluding tomtate and blue runner.

Comprehensive ACL Amendment (2011); regulations effective April 16, 2012 –

Gray Triggerfish:

ABC = 672,565 pounds ww.

Allocations = 45.39% commercial; 54.61% recreational.

Commercial ACL = 305,262 pounds ww.

Recreational ACL = 367,303 pounds ww.

Recreational ACT = 312,208 pounds ww.

In-season and post-season AMs:

Commercial - If the commercial sector ACL is met or projected to be met, all purchase and sale is prohibited and harvest and/or possession is limited to the bag limit. If the commercial sector ACL is exceeded, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the commercial sector ACL in the following season by the amount of the overage only if the species is overfished.

Recreational - If the recreational sector ACL is exceeded, the following year's landings would be monitored in-season for persistence in increased landings. The Regional Administrator will publish a notice to reduce the length of the fishing season as necessary.

Hogfish

Need to complete

Current status/issues:

- Stock assessment scheduled for 2013.
- Snapper Grouper AP recommendations:
 - October 2011 – increase size limit to 14 inches TL (both rec and comm) and limit recreational catch to 5 fish per person per day.
 - April 2012 - increase minimum size limit to 14 inches TL.
- Changing the size and bag limit for gray triggerfish was included as a possible action in CE-BA 3 and taken out to scoping in Jan/Feb 2012. It was also considered during the early development Amendment 13C to the Snapper Grouper FMP. The majority of the people who commented on the issue were in favor of the proposed changes.

In 2012, the Snapper Grouper AP made the following recommendation:

RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER INCREASING THE
MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT OF GRAY TRIGGERFISH AND HOGFISH TO 14 INCHES

- The Council chose to remove the action to consider changes to the gray triggerfish size limit until after the completion of the stock assessment in 2013.

Actions under consideration

Action 4. Change the measurement method for gray triggerfish to have consistency between state and federal waters.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Currently, the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish is specified in inches total length (TL) in federal waters off east Florida only. In Florida state waters, the minimum size for gray triggerfish is specified in inches fork length (FL).

Alternative 2. Specify the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in inches fork length (FL) in federal waters off east Florida.

Action 5. Increase the minimum size limit for hogfish.

Note: There is a discrepancy in current minimum size specifications (FL vs. TL) for hogfish.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Currently, the minimum size limit for hogfish is 12 inches fork length (FL) in federal waters of the South Atlantic Region, and state waters of South Carolina and Florida. The minimum size limit for hogfish is 12 inches total length (TL) in state waters of North Carolina. There is no minimum size limit for hogfish in state waters of Georgia.

Alternative 2. Increase the minimum size limit for hogfish in federal waters to 13 inches fork length (FL).

Alternative 3. Increase the minimum size limit for hogfish in federal waters to 14 inches fork length (FL).

IV. Black sea bass

Management Background

Amendment 13C (2006) - regulations effective Oct. 23, 2006 - implemented the following management measures for black sea bass:

Commercial: Commercial quota (gutted weight) of 477,000 pounds gw in year 1, 423,000 pounds gw in year 2, and 309,000 pounds gw in year 3 onwards. Require use of at least 2 inch mesh for the entire back panel of black sea bass pots effective 6 months after publication of the final rule. Require black sea bass pots be removed from the water when the quota is met.

Change fishing year from calendar year to June 1 – May 31.

Recreational: Recreational allocation of 633,000 pounds gw in year 1, 560,000 pounds gw in year 2, and 409,000 pounds gw in year 3 onwards. Increase minimum size limit from 10 inches to 11 inches in year 1 and to 12 inches in year 2. Reduce recreational bag limit from 20 to 15 per person per day. Change fishing year from the calendar year to June 1 through May 31.

Rationale for fishing year change: Changing the commercial fishing year would likely reduce socio-economic impacts by shifting the potential filling of the quota to the months where the least amount of fishing effort occurs. The recreational fishing year was changed to be consistent with the commercial fishing year.

Regulatory Amendment 9 (2010) – the amendment originally included a suite of harvest management measure for black sea bass, including a change in the fishing year. The South Atlantic Council received public input on the alternatives below:

Alternative 3. Retain the June-May fishing year. Specify separate commercial ACLs for June-November and December-May based on landings from 2006-2009.

Alternative 4. Retain the June-May fishing year. Specify commercial ACLs for June-December and January-May based on landings from 2006-2009.

Alternative 5. Change the black sea bass fishing year to November-October. Specify separate commercial ACLs for November-April 30 and May 1-October based on landings from 2006-2009.

Alternative 6. Change the black sea bass fishing year to January-December. Separate commercial ACLs for January-June and July-December based on landings from 2006-2009.

Current status/issues:

- Right whale calving season in the South Atlantic is November through April. Interactions with commercial black sea bass pots are a concern. However, Amendment 18A implemented measures to limit participation and reduce effort in the commercial fishery. When ABC increases as the stock rebuilds, fishing with pots during the November-April calving season could be a concern.
- The black sea bass fishing year north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina is the calendar year. Black sea bass are managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.
- In 2010, the Snapper Grouper AP made the following recommendations:
 - COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER A SEPARATE BSB ALLOCATION FOR POT FISHERY FOR THE STATE OF FLORIDA (ADDITIONAL, SEPARATE QUOTA).

COUNCIL SHOULD DIRECT STAFF TO COME UP WITH ALTERNATIVES TO CONSIDER THE ABOVE.

- AP SUPPORTS A SPAWNING CLOSURE FOR BSB (COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL).
- In 2011, the Snapper Grouper AP made the following recommendations:
 - CHANGE THE RECREATIONAL FISHING YEAR FOR BLACK SEA BASS TO BEGIN APRIL 1ST
 - REQUEST THAT THE COUNCIL ONCE AGAIN CONSIDER REGIONAL APPROACHES TO RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT AS APPROPRIATE
 - ALLOCATE THE BLACK SEA BASS COMMERCIAL ACL TO HOOK & LINE AND POT SECTORS AT THE HISTORICAL LEVELS. THE PERCENTAGE THAT THE DISQUALIFIED POT FISHERMEN WOULD HAVE LANDED IS ADDED TO THE HOOK AND LINE FISHERY
 - COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER ESTABLISHING SPAWNING SEASON CLOSURES FOR BSB BY REGIONS UNTIL THE STOCK IS REBUILT
- Amendment 18A became effective on June 1, 2012 and implemented the following regulations:
 - Commercial Sector:
 - (1) An endorsement program for the commercial black sea bass pot segment of the snapper-grouper fishery; (2) an appeals process for the endorsement program; (3) modifications to commercial AMs; (4) a limit of 35 black sea bass pot tags issued to each endorsement holder each permit year; (5) a requirement to bring black sea bass pots back to shore at the end of each trip; (6) a 1,000 pounds gw (1,180 pounds ww) commercial trip limit for the black sea bass commercial sector; and (7) an increase to the commercial minimum size limit for black sea bass from 10 inches TL to 11 inches TL.
 - *The commercial fishing season for black sea bass in the 2012-2013 fishing year opened July 1, 2012.
 - Recreational Sector:
 - (1) An increase to the recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass from 12 inches TL to 13 inches TL; (2) modifications to recreational AMs; and (3) a requirement for selected for-hire vessels to report landings information electronically on a weekly or daily basis.
- An update to the black sea bass stock assessment is underway.

Actions under consideration

Action 6. Revise the annual catch limit (ACL), including sector ACLs, optimum yield (OY), and annual catch target (ACT) for black sea bass.

Alternative 1 (No Action).

Current ABC = 847,240 lb ww landed catch = 717,797 lb gw

Current ACL = 847,240 lb ww = 718,000 lb gw

Allocation: 43% commercial; 57% recreational

Commercial ACL = 364,620 lb ww = 309,000 lb gw

Recreational ACL = 482,620 lb ww = 409,000 lb gw

Recreational ACT = 160,098 lb ww = 153,940 lb gw

Need to add current OY wording.

Alternative 2. Revise the ACL (including sector ACLs) for black sea bass based on the SSC's recommendation of P-rebuild of 62.5%, and results of the black sea bass assessment update. New ABC and ACLs based on results of the black sea bass assessment update.

Action 7. Modify the fishing year for the black sea bass recreational sector.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational fishing year for black sea bass begins on June 1 and ends on May 31.

Alternative 2. Modify the recreational fishing year for black sea bass to begin on January 1 and end on December 31.

Alternative 3. Modify the recreational fishing year for black sea bass to begin on April 1 and end on March 31.

Alternative 4. Modify the recreational fishing year for black sea bass to begin on October 1 and end on September 30.

Action 8. Modify the fishing year for the black sea bass commercial sector.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial fishing year for black sea bass begins on June 1 and ends on May 31.

Alternative 2. Modify the commercial fishing year for black sea bass to begin on July 1 and end on June 30.

Alternative 3. Open the black sea bass commercial season only to the hook and line sector on June 1, with a trip limit of 50 pounds. The trip limit ends with the opening of the black sea bass pot season.

Alternative 4. Open the black sea bass commercial season only to the hook and line sector on May 1, with a trip limit of 50 pounds. The trip limit ends with the opening of the black sea bass pot season.

V. Vermilion Snapper

Management Background

The South Atlantic Council initially considered implementing commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper in **Amendment 16** (2009). However, the alternative was moved to the Considered but Rejected Appendix

Regulatory Amendment 9 (2010); regulations effective July 15, 2011 -- implemented a 1,500-pound commercial trip limit for this species.

Current status/issues:

- The 2012 update to SEDAR 17 showed that vermilion snapper are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The stock is very close to B_{MSY} and the SSB is also very close to SSB_{MSY} . Current fishing mortality (F) is well below F_{MSY} . While stock biomass shows a significant decrease over the assessment period, this is expected in a fishery being harvested at exploitation rates approaching the MSY-level. Evidence in some model outputs suggests that the vermilion snapper stock is being sustainably harvested and that the stock is approaching an equilibrium condition.
- In 2010 the Snapper Grouper AP supported the 1,500-pound trip limit.
- Actions to revise the ACLs for vermilion snapper, modify the commercial trip limit, modify the commercial fishing seasons, and remove the recreational closed season for vermilion snapper are being considered in Regulatory Amendment 18.

Actions under consideration

Action 9. Modify the recreational bag limit for vermilion snapper.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current recreational bag limit is 5 per person per day.

Alternative 2. Increase the recreational bag limit for vermilion snapper to 6 per person per day.

Alternative 3. Increase the recreational bag limit for vermilion snapper to 8 per person per day.

Alternative 4. Increase the recreational bag limit for vermilion snapper to 10 per person per day.

Preliminary Analysis

On June 29, 2009 Amendment 16 reduced the vermilion snapper bag limit from 10 fish per person to 5 fish per person. On July 15, 2011, Regulatory Amendment 9 established a 1,500 pound gutted weight commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper. A recent stock assessment of vermilion snapper now indicates recreational and commercial annual catch limits (ACL) may be increased. In recent years, the recreational ACL has not been met, but the commercial ACL has been met or exceeded very quickly. The following analysis evaluates increases and decreases in the recreational bag limit and reductions in the commercial trip limit in order to increase or decrease harvest rates.

Bag limit analysis for South Atlantic vermilion snapper

Landings and catch-effort data from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) and Southeast Headboat Survey (HBS) were used to evaluate reduction and increases in vermilion snapper harvest associated with various recreational bag limits. Only data for 2010 and 2011 were used. The bag limit was reduced in mid-2009 and data for 2012 are incomplete.

Figure 1 displays the distribution of South Atlantic vermilion snapper landed per angler by mode. A majority of fishing trips landed on average one or less vermilion snapper per angler, but there were numerous trips that also landed on average 2-5 vermilion snapper per angler.

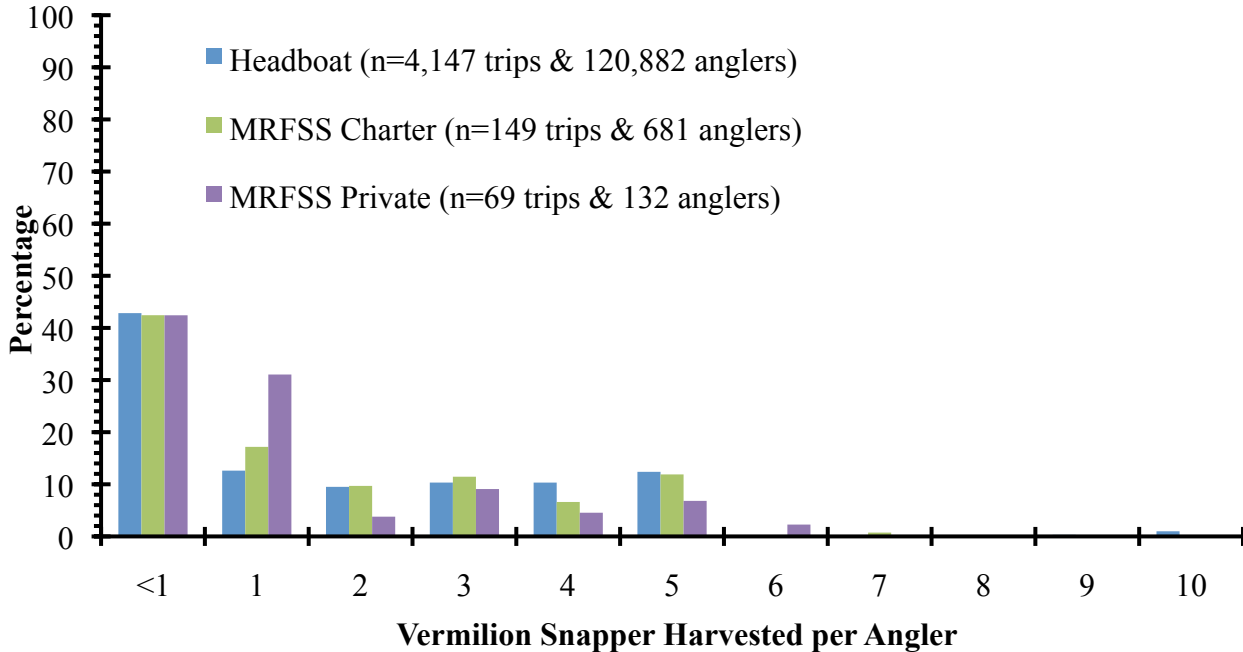


Figure 2. Distribution of South Atlantic vermilion snapper harvested per angler by mode and data source for 2010 and 2011.

The percent decrease and percent increase in landings was calculated for various vermilion snapper bag limits. Percent increases were calculated for bag limits of 6, 8, and 10 vermilion snapper. Calculations assumed anglers landing the current 5 fish bag limit would also land bag limits of 6, 8, or 10 fish (Table 1). Calculations likely overestimate increases associated with larger bag limits since it's unlikely all anglers previously landing the 5 fish bag limit would also land larger bag limits. Reductions in the bag limit were calculated by reducing the catch per angler on trips exceeding the proposed bag limit (Table 1). Reported landings were then re-estimated. Trips exceeding the current 5-fish bag limit were excluded from estimated reductions since these trips were already out of compliance with current regulations.

Table 2. Percent increases and percent reductions in landings for various recreational vermilion snapper bag limits. Estimated reductions were calculated in numbers of fish by mode and data source and then weighted by each dataset’s contribution to the total landings. The green cells represent percent increases in landings and the red cells represent percent reductions in landings.

Bag Limit	Year		
	2010	2011	2010-2011 avg
10	29.6	25.6	27.9
8	17.1	15.2	16.2
6	5.3	4.9	5.1
5 (status quo)	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	8.3	7.3	7.9
3	20.8	19.0	20.0
2	38.0	35.8	37.0
1	60.2	58.3	59.4

Trip limit analysis for South Atlantic vermilion snapper

Landings and catch-effort data were obtained from the coastal logbook program. Data for 2009-2011 were used. There was no trip limit in 2009 or 2010, but a 1,500 pound gutted weight trip limit was implemented on July 15, 2011. The analysis was conducted as if no trip limit was implemented in 2011. When logbook data are available for 2012, analyses will be updated to evaluate reductions in landings associated with the 1,500-pound trip limit.

Figure 3 provides a frequency distribution of landings by trip for 2009-2011. Thirty-four percent of the trips caught less than 100 pounds of vermilion snapper. In 2011, there was an increase in the percentage of trips harvesting approximately 1,000 pounds. This peak is likely the result of the 1,500-pound trip limit imposed on July 15, 2011.

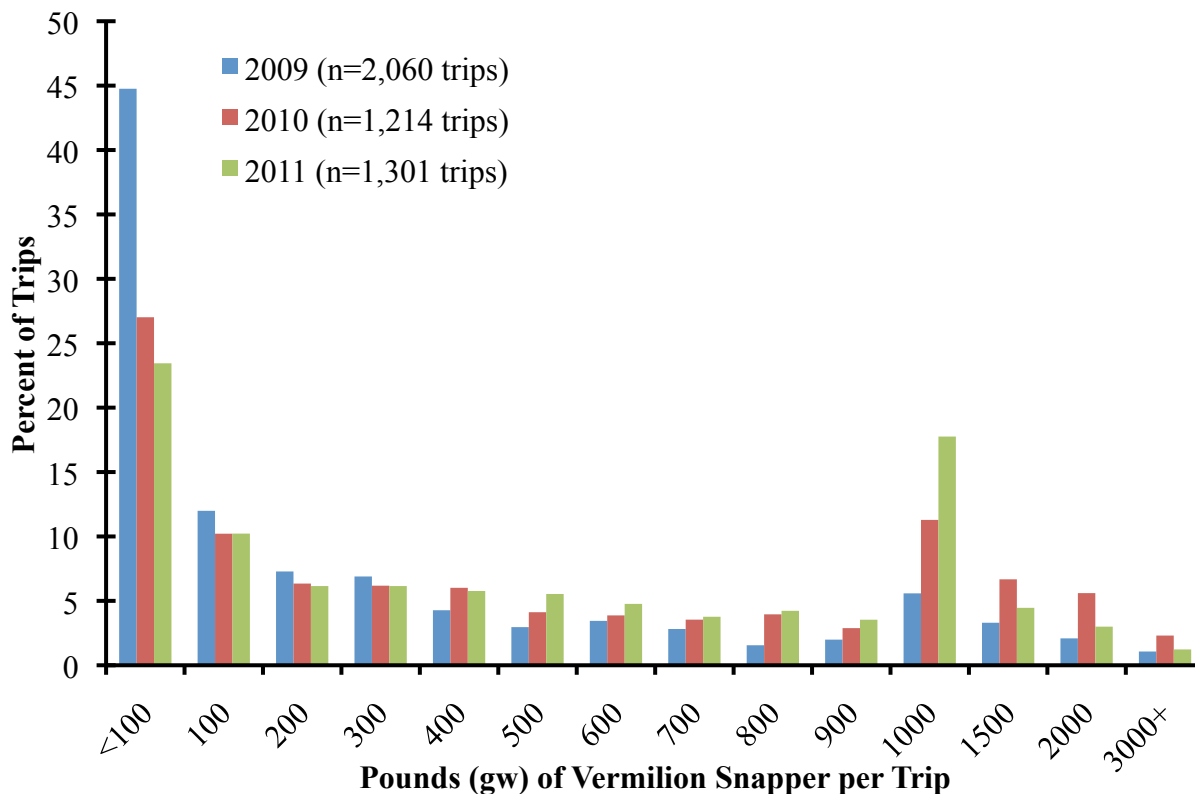


Figure 3. Frequency distribution of South Atlantic vermilion snapper pounds per trip for the commercial landings in 2009, 2010, and 2011.

Trip limits ranging from 100 to 1,500 pounds were explored. Percent reductions in landings are provided in Table 2.

Table 3. Percent reductions in landings for various commercial trip limits based on South Atlantic commercial logbook data for the years 2009-2011.

Trip Limit	Year			
	2009	2010	2011	2009-2011
100	82.8	88.3	87.3	86.2
200	70.7	78.6	76.6	75.3
300	60.7	70.0	67.1	66.0
400	52.7	62.3	58.6	57.9
500	45.9	55.5	50.8	50.8
600	40.1	49.4	44.0	44.5
700	35.1	44.0	37.9	39.0
800	30.8	39.0	32.4	34.1
900	27.1	34.5	27.6	29.8
1000	23.8	30.6	23.3	25.9
1500	12.3	15.8	9.5	12.5

VI. Grouper

Management Background

Amendment 16 (2009) -- ended overfishing of gag by establishing a seasonal closure for gag and associated shallow-water grouper species, reducing the aggregate bag limit for grouper and tilefish, establishing a quota for the commercial fishery, prohibiting retention of the aggregate grouper bag limit by captain and crew on for-hire vessels, and establishing restrictions on the possession, sale, and purchase of gag and associated shallow-water groupers after the gag commercial quota was reached.

Amendment 17B (2010) – established an aggregate ACL for gag, black grouper and red grouper and established accountability measures.

Amendment 24 (2012) – removed the gag, black grouper and red grouper aggregate and modified accountability measures accordingly.

Current status/issues:

- In 2012, the Snapper Grouper AP made the following recommendation:
MOTION: CONSIDER AN ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURE THAT THE TRIP LIMIT BE REDUCED TO 300 POUNDS WHEN 75% OF THE GAG COMMERCIAL QUOTA IS LANDED.
APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)
- A stock assessment is not scheduled for 2013.

Actions under consideration

Action 10. Modify the aggregate grouper bag limit.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current aggregate grouper bag limit is 3 fish. Within this limit, only one fish can be a gag or black grouper.

Alternative 2. Modify the aggregate grouper bag limit.

Sub-alternative 2a. Increase the aggregate grouper bag limit from 3 to 4 fish. Within this limit, two fish can be gag grouper.

Sub-alternative 2b. Increase the aggregate grouper bag limit from 3 to 4 fish. Within this limit, 1 fish can be a gag grouper.

New Action 11. Modify the accountability measure for the commercial sector for gag.

Alternative 1 (No Action). If gag commercial landings reach or are projected to reach the ACL, the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the commercial fishery for gag for the remainder of the fishing year. Reduce the unadjusted gag commercial ACL from 353,940 pounds gutted weight to 326,722 pounds gutted weight to account for projected gag discard mortality from commercial trips that target co-occurring species (i.e., red grouper and scamp) following a projected gag closure. **This is the current preferred alt in Reg 15**

NOTE: The current gag ACL was adjusted for post-quota bycatch mortality in accordance with analyses in Amendment 16 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of

the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 16). The unadjusted commercial gag ACL is 353,940 pounds gutted weight.

Alternative 2. Modify the commercial AM for gag. Reduce the trip limit to 300 lbs when 75% of the gag commercial ACL is landed.

Vermilion and Red Porgy AM Actions????

At the December 2012 meeting, the Council indicated their interest in conducting a comprehensive review of accountability measure for all snapper grouper species. Council staff prepared a spreadsheet to summarize all of the existing (commercial and recreational) regulations for each species. The Council approved the following in the Timing and Task motion:

11. WORK WITH SERO STAFF TO FINALIZE THE REGULATIONS SPREADSHEET AND BRING OPTIONS TO THE COMMITTEE IN JUNE 2013 THAT CONSIDER CHANGES TO AMs.