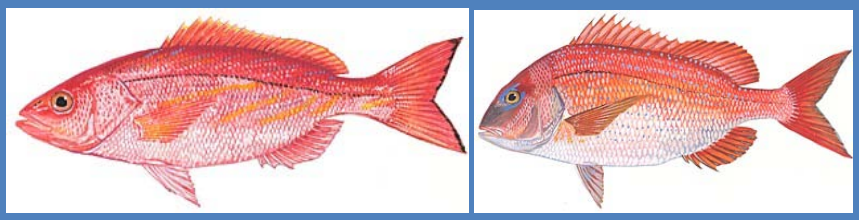
Decision Document

Regulatory Amendment 18

to the Fishery Management Plan for the

Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region



St. Simons Island, GA

March 2013

1.1 What Actions Are Being Proposed?

Revisions to annual catch limits (ACLs) (including sector ACLs)/optimum yield for vermilion snapper and red porgy, revisions to the annual catch target (ACT) for red porgy, modification of the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper, modification of the commercial fishing seasons for vermilion snapper, and modification of the recreational closed season for vermilion snapper.

1.2 Who is Proposing the Actions?

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) is proposing the actions. The South Atlantic Council developed the regulatory amendment and submits it to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) who ultimately approves the final rule to implement the regulatory amendment on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce. NMFS is an agency in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

1.3 Why is the South Atlantic Council Considering Action?

Stock assessment updates for vermilion snapper and red porgy were recently completed. The vermilion snapper update indicates the stock is no longer undergoing overfishing and is not overfished. The stock assessment update for red porgy indicates the species is not undergoing overfishing but is still overfished. Furthermore, the red porgy assessment update determined the stock cannot rebuild on schedule even if $F_{rebuild}$ were set to zero for the remainder of the rebuilding period.

The South Atlantic Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) has reviewed the stock assessment updates and recommended updated acceptable biological catch levels (ABC) for both species. Based on the new ABC recommendations the South Atlantic Council will update the ACLs for vermilion snapper and red porgy accordingly. Additionally, the South Atlantic Council may update the ACT for red porgy.

The SSC has recommended a larger ABC for vermilion snapper than is currently in place, which could result in an increase in the commercial and recreational ACLs. Due to the potential for increased harvest, the South Atlantic Council will consider modifying the current commercial trip limit, the commercial split fishing season dates, and the recreational closed season for vermilion snapper.

Note: The purpose and need below is recommended by IPT for Council's consideration:

Committee Actions

Option 1. Accept the purpose and need recommended by the IPT.

Option 2. Modify the purpose and need and approve.

Option 3. Others??

Purpose for Action

The purpose of Regulatory Amendment 18 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Regulatory Amendment 18) is to revise the vermilion snapper and red porgy ACLs, and the red porgy ACT based on the results of stock assessment updates completed in October 2012. Additionally, Regulatory Amendment 18 would modify commercial and recreational management measures for vermilion snapper to optimize utilization of the resource.

Need for Action

The need for this action is to update ACLs for vermilion snapper and red porgy based on results from recent stock assessment updates, ensure overfishing does not occur, prevent unnecessary negative socio-economic impacts that may otherwise be realized in the snapper grouper fishery and fishing community, and to ensure the use of best available science.

1.4 Which species are affected by this action?

The species affected by the actions in Regulatory Amendment 18 include vermilion snapper and red porgy in waters of the South Atlantic. Both are assessed species that were assigned ABCs, ACLs, and accountability measures through Amendment 17B (SAFMC 2010b) and the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011b). Recent stock assessment updates have been completed for both species and this amendment would implement modifications to harvest parameters and management measures based on the results of those updates.

1.5 Stock Assessment Information Considered in This Amendment

The actions and alternatives under consideration in Regulatory Amendment 18 are based on the results of stock assessment updates for vermilion snapper and red porgy completed through the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process in October 2012. The South Atlantic Council's SSC met to review the stock assessment in October 2012 and determined both were adequate and suitable to inform management decisions.

Vermilion snapper was last assessed through SEDAR 17 (SEDAR 17 2008), a benchmark assessment, which included landings information through 2007. The 2008 benchmark assessment indicated the stock was experiencing overfishing but was not overfished. The terminal year for the 2012 assessment update was 2011; therefore, SEDAR 17 was updated with four additional years of data using the same methods in the benchmark assessment completed in 2008. For recreational harvest of vermilion snapper, the 2012 assessment update used new estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) for 2004-2011 replacing the previous Marine Recreational Fishing Statistics Survey (MRFSS) estimates from 2004-2007. The 2012 assessment update indicated vermilion snapper is neither overfished, nor experiencing overfishing.

The last benchmark assessment for red porgy was SEDAR 1 (2002), and included data from 1972-2001. This 2002 benchmark assessment indicated red porgy was experiencing overfishing and was overfished. SEDAR 1 (2002) was subsequently updated in 2006 and included data through 2004. Much of the data used in the 2006 SEDAR 1 updates were unchanged; therefore, most data sets were simply updated by adding the seven additional years (2005-2011) of information at the end of the time series. New recreational MRIP harvest estimates for red porgy were available for 2004-2011; therefore, for the 2012 assessment update, the new MRIP estimates were used in place of the previous MRFSS estimates for 2004. Additionally, discard data from 2001-2004 were updated for the commercial handline and headboat sectors based on updated information in the logbook databases. The new assessment update for red porgy also updated the Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment, and Prediction (MARMAP) index for chevron traps through 2011, and the age and length composition data from MARMAP were also updated. The 2006 update indicated red porgy was no longer experiencing overfishing and was rebuilding; however, the stock remained overfished. SEDAR 1 (2002) was again updated through the most recent 2012 SEDAR 1 update, which incorporated data through 2011. The 2012 assessment update determined that red porgy is not experiencing overfishing but is overfished. The 2012 assessment update indicated rebuilding is not occurring as expected due to poor recruitment and the stock will not rebuild by the end of the rebuilding period. Red porgy is in an 18-year rebuilding plan that was established in 1999 through Amendment 12 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2000).

The SSC recommended a new benchmark assessment be completed for red porgy in 2014, and the new assessment is on the SEDAR calendar for that time.

ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Action 1: Revise the Annual Catch Limit (ACL, including sector ACLs) and Optimum Yield (OY) for Vermilion Snapper.

Alternative 1 (No action). For vermilion snapper, retain the current ACLs and OY:
Current ACL = 1,066,000 lbs ww (yield at 75%F_{MSY}) = 960,361 lbs gutted weight
Commercial ACL = 653,045 lbs gw (724,880 lbs ww)
(divided into 315,523 lbs gw from Jan-June and 302,523 lb gw July-Dec)
Recreational ACL = 307,316 lbs gw (341,121 lbs whole weight)
Current OY = 1,635,000 lbs ww (1,472,973 lbs gw) (at equilibrium)

Note: These values are based upon the results of SEDAR 17 (SEDAR 17 2008); current ABC = 1,109,000 lbs whole weight total kill = 1,078,000 lbs ww landed catch (P*=0.275); allocation of 68% commercial and 32% recreational. The current MSY = 1,665,000 lbs ww (at equilibrium).

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) included an action in Amendment 16 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (Amendment 16)(SAFMC 2009a) to allow the Regional Administrator to make adjustments to management measures for vermilion snapper based on the outcome of SEDAR 17 (SEDAR 17 2008). These adjustments were made in the final rule for Amendment 16 (SAFMC 2009a).

The 2012 and current 2013 Commercial ACL for Jan-June is reduced by 11,000 lbs gw for post quota bycatch mortality (PQBM) and July-Dec by 24,000 lbs gw PQBM. The PQBM adjustments were established in Amendment 16 (SAFMC 2009a).

Alternative 2. Revise ACL (including sector ACLs) for vermilion snapper for 2013 through 2016 as shown below and set ACL=ABC=OY. The acceptable biological catch (ABC) and ACL values for 2013 onwards are based on landed catch only; discards are accounted for in specifying the ABC in terms of landed catch and not total kill. The values for 2016 would remain until modified.

Note: The values for **Alternative 2** are shown in **Table 2.1.1**.

Table 2.1.1 ABC/ACLs for 2013-2016 from the recent SEDAR assessment and the South Atlantic Council/SSC-approved ABC control rule.

Year	ABC ww	Total ACL ww	Comm ACL ww	Rec ACL ww
2013	1,372,000	1,372,000	932,960	439,040
2014	1,312,000	1,312,000	892,160	419,840
2015	1,289,000	1,289,000	876,520	412,480
2016	1,269,000	1,269,000	862,920	406,080

Amendment 16 (SAFMC 2009a) specified a formula for MSY for vermilion snapper, which is the yield at F_{MSY} and is defined by the most recent Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment. Because an assessment update was recently completed for vermilion snapper (SEDAR 17 Update 2012), a new value for MSY is specified in this amendment using the established MSY formula from Amendment 16; this does not require any Council action. Based on the stock assessment update, the new values for MSY and F_{MSY} appear in **Table 2.1.2**.

Table 2.1.2 Current and proposed values for MSY and F_{MSY} for vermilion snapper.

Management Reference Point	Current Value (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) (SEDAR 17 2008)	Proposed New Value (SEDAR 17 Update 2012)
MSY	1,665,000 lbs ww	1,563,000 lbs ww
F_{MSY}	0.386	0.75

Committee Actions

Option 1. Select Alternative 1 as preferred alternative.

Option 2. Select Alternative 2 as preferred alternative.

Option 3. Others??

2.2 Action 2: Modify the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current commercial trip limit is 1,500 lbs gw (1,665 lbs ww).

Alternative 2. Reduce the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper to 1,000 lbs gw (1,110 lbs ww).

Alternative 3. Reduce the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper to 1,000 lbs gw (1,110 lbs ww). When 75% of the commercial ACL has been met or projected to be met, reduce the commercial trip limit to 500 lbs gw (555 lbs ww).

Committee Actions

Option 1. Select Alternative 1 as preferred alternative.

Option 2. Select Alternative 2 as preferred alternative.

Option 3. Select Alternative 3 as preferred alternative.

Option 4. Others??

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** it is reasonable to assume that commercial fishing opportunities for vermilion snapper in the South Atlantic would be similar to 2011 and 2012. With an increase in the commercial ACL (Action 1), it is possible the fishing season could be extended somewhat from 2012.

Pounds of vermilion snapper caught per trip from 2010 through 2012 is shown in **Figure 4.2.1** (NMFS 2013a). In 2012, with a 1,500 lbs trip limit in place, 17 of the 1,248 trips reported landings in excess of the 1,500 lbs trip limit. These 17 trips ranged from 1,669 to 1,966 lbs ww (1,504 to 1,771 lbs gw). Therefore, even with an increased ACL under Action 1, maintaining the current trip limit would have little biological effect. To constrain harvest, AMs would be implemented when the ACL is met or expected to be met.

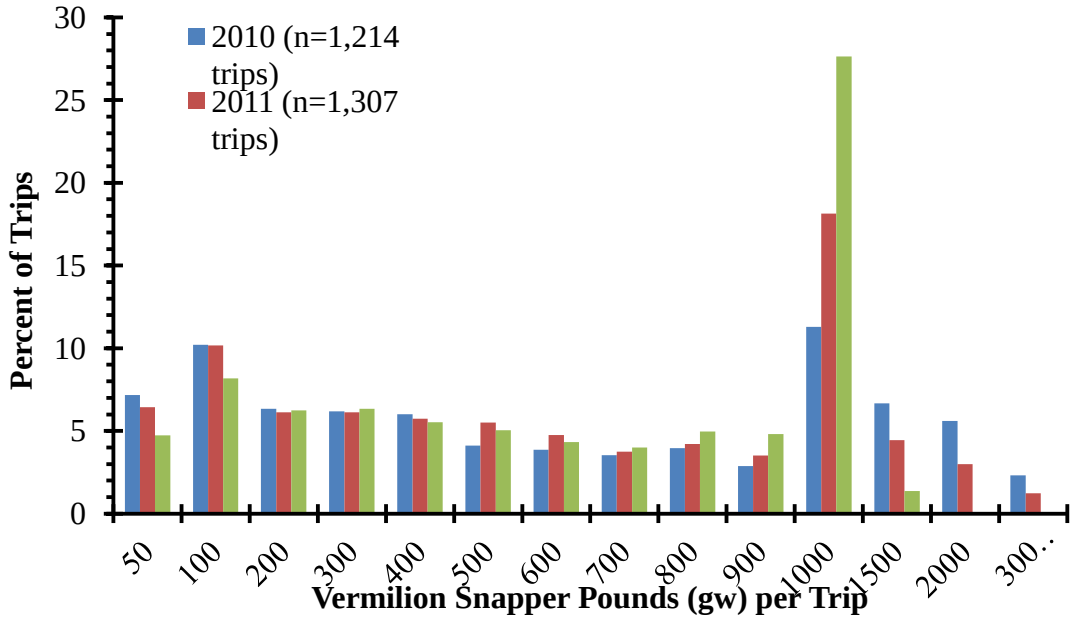


Figure 4.2.1. Distribution of South Atlantic vermilion snapper pounds per trip for the commercial landings in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Source: NMFS 2012.

Table 4.2.1. Past and predicted closure dates for 2010, 2011, 2012, and under **Alternatives 1** and **2** with the increased ACL proposed in Action 1**.**

Year	Season 1 (January – June)	Season 2 (July – December)
2009	N/A*	September 4
2010	March 19	October 6
2011	March 10**	September 20
2012	February 29***	September 28***
Predicted Closure Dates Under **Alternative 1**	March 5-6	September 21
Predicted Closure Dates Under **Alternative 2**	March 17-21	October 2-4

*Amendment 16 was not implemented until July 2012. Therefore, there was no January – June split season in 2009.
**The first commercial fishing season was re-opened for one week (May 1 – May 8, 2011) because the commercial ACL had not been reached for the first split season of 2011.
***Regulatory Amendment 9 implemented a 1,500 lbs commercial trip limit for the 2012 fishing seasons (effective July 15, 2012).

Table 4.2.2. Past and predicted closure dates for 2010, 2011, 2012, and under **Alternatives 1** and **3** with the increased ACL proposed in Action 1, Alternative 2**.**

Year	Season 1 (January – June) Closure Date	Season 2 (July – December) Closure Date
2009	N/A*	September 4
2010	March 19	October 6
2011	March 10**	September 20
2012	February 29***	September 28***
Predicted Dates When 75% of the ACL Will be Harvested Under **Alternative 3**	March 1	September 18
Predicted Closure Dates Under **Alternative 1**	March 5-6	September 21
Predicted Closure Dates Under **Alternative 3**	March 29 – April 2	October 14-20

*Amendment 16 was not implemented until July 2012. Therefore, there was no January – June split season in 2009.
**The first commercial fishing season was re-opened for one week (May 1 – May 8, 2011) because the commercial ACL had not been reached for the first split season of 2011.
***Regulatory Amendment 9 implemented a 1,500 lbs commercial trip limit for the 2012 fishing seasons (effective July 15, 2012).

2.3 Action 3: Modify the commercial fishing seasons for vermilion snapper.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial fishing year for vermilion snapper is split into two seasons of equal duration, each with its own ACL. The first season begins on January 1 and ends on June 30 (6 months). The second season begins on July 1 and ends on December 31 (6 months). The commercial ACL is split equally between the two seasons.

Note: The figures with the new commercial ACLs, assuming Alternative 2 is chosen for Action 1, split by the current seasons **(Alternative 1, No Action)** are shown in **Table 2.3.1**.

Table 2.3.1. ABC/ACLs and commercial split season ACLs using the current fishing season for 2013-2016 based on the recent SEDAR assessment and the South Atlantic Council/SSC-approved ABC control rule.

Year	ABC ww	Total ACL ww	Comm ACL ww	Comm ACL Jan-June ww	Comm ACL July-Dec ww
2013	1,372,000	1,372,000	932,960	466,480	466,480
2014	1,312,000	1,312,000	892,160	446,080	446,080
2015	1,289,000	1,289,000	876,520	438,260	438,260
2016	1,269,000	1,269,000	862,920	431,460	431,460

Alternative 2. Modify the commercial fishing seasons for vermilion snapper.

> **Sub-alternative 2a.** Modify the commercial fishing seasons for vermilion snapper so that the first season begins on January 1 and ends on May 31 (5 months) and the second season begins on June 1 and ends on December 31 (7 months). The commercial ACL would be split equally between the two seasons as is currently the case.

Note: The figures with the new commercial ACLs split by the proposed seasons under **Sub-alternative 2a** are shown in **Table 2.3.2**.

Table 2.3.2. ABC/ACLs and commercial split season ACLs using the fishing season proposed under **Alternative 2a** for 2013-2016 based on the recent SEDAR assessment and the South Atlantic Council/SSC-approved ABC control rule.

Year	ABC ww	Total ACL ww	Comm ACL ww	Comm ACL Jan-May ww	Comm ACL June-Dec ww
2013	1,372,000	1,372,000	932,960	466,480	466,480
2014	1,312,000	1,312,000	892,160	446,080	446,080
2015	1,289,000	1,289,000	876,520	438,260	438,260
2016	1,269,000	1,269,000	862,920	431,460	431,460

> **Sub-alternative 2b.** Modify the commercial fishing seasons for vermilion snapper so that the first season begins on January 1 and ends on April 30 (4 months). The second season begins on May 1 and ends on December 31 (8 months). The commercial ACL would be split equally between the two seasons as is currently the case.

Note: The figures with the new commercial ACLs split by the proposed seasons under **Sub-alternative 2b** are shown in **Table 2.3.3**.

Table 2.3.3. ABC/ACLs and commercial split season ACLs using the fishing season proposed under **Alternative 2b** for 2013-2016 based on the recent SEDAR assessment and the South Atlantic Council/SSC-approved ABC control rule.

Year	ABC ww	Total ACL ww	Comm ACL ww	Comm ACL Jan-April ww	Comm ACL May-Dec ww
2013	1,372,000	1,372,000	932,960	466,480	466,480
2014	1,312,000	1,312,000	892,160	446,080	446,080
2015	1,289,000	1,289,000	876,520	438,260	438,260
2016	1,269,000	1,269,000	862,920	431,460	431,460

Committee Actions

Option 1. Select Alternative 1 as preferred alternative.

Option 2. Select Alternative 2a as preferred alternative.

Option 3. Select Alternative 2b as preferred alternative.

Option 4. Others??

2.4 Action 4: Modify the recreational closed season for vermilion snapper.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Recreational harvest of vermilion snapper is prohibited annually from November 1 to March 31 (5 months).

Alternative 2. Remove the recreational season closure for vermilion snapper.

Committee Actions

Option 1. Select Alternative 1 as preferred alternative.

Option 2. Select Alternative 2 as preferred alternative.

Option 3. Others??

2.5 Action 5: Revise the Annual Catch Limit (ACL, including sector ACLs), Optimum Yield (OY), and Annual Catch Target (ACT) for Red Porgy.

Alternative 1. No action. For red porgy, retain the current ACLs, OY, and recreational ACT:

Current ACL = 395,304 lbs ww = 380,100 lbs gw

Commercial ACL = 197,652 lbs ww = 190,050 lbs gw

Recreational ACL = 197,652 lbs ww = 190,050 lbs gw

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

OY = 395,304 lbs ww (OY=ACL=ABC)

Note: These values are based upon the results of SEDAR 1 (SEDAR 1 2002); Current ABC = 395,304 lbs ww landed catch; allocation of 50% commercial and 50% recreational. MSY = the yield produced by F_{MSY}. MSY and F_{MSY} are defined by the most recent stock assessment. MSY = 625,699 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Revise the ACL (including sector ACLs) for red porgy for 2013 through 2018 as shown below using the OY=ACL=ABC formula established in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011b). The values for 2018 would remain until modified.

Note: The new ABC, ACLs, and recreational ACT under **Alternative 2** are shown in **Table 2.5.1**.

Table 2.5.1. New ABC and ACLs based on scenario 6 projection results from Table 24 of the red porgy assessment. Gutted weight determined with conversion factor of 1.04 from commercial logbooks.

Year	ABC ww	Total ACL ww	Comm ACL ww	Rec ACL ww	Rec ACT ww
2013	306,000	306,000	153,000	153,000	109,670
2014	309,000	309,000	154,500	154,500	110,746
2015	328,000	328,000	164,000	164,000	117,555
2016	354,000	354,000	177,000	177,000	126,874
2017	379,000	379,000	189,500	189,500	135,834
2018	401,000	401,000	200,500	200,500	143,718

Amendment 15A established a definition of MSY for red porgy. MSY equals the yield produced by F_{MSY}; MSY and F_{MSY} are defined by the most recent SEDAR Update. The new values for MSY and F_{MSY} from the most recent assessment update appear in **Table 2.5.2**.

Table 2.5.2. Current and proposed values of MSY and F_{MSY} for red porgy.

Management Reference Point	Current Value (Alternative 1 (No Action)) (SEDAR 1 Update 2006)	Proposed New Value (SEDAR 1 Update 2012)
MSY	625,699 lbs ww	834,000 lbs ww
F_{MSY}	0.20	0.17

Committee Actions

Option 1. Select Alternative 1 as preferred alternative.

Option 2. Select Alternative 2 as preferred alternative.

Option 3. Others??

Expected Schedule for Regulatory Amendment 13

1. March 4-8, 2013 – Council reviews action and selects preferred alternatives; approve for formal review.
2. March 22, 2013 – Council sends document for formal review and implementation
3. October 2013 – regulations effective

Committee Action to Approve Amendment

Option 1. Approve Regulatory Amendment 18 for formal review.

Option 2. Do not proceed with Regulatory Amendment 18.

Option 3. Others??

Committee Action to Approve Codified Text

Option 1. Approve Regulatory Amendment 18 codified text as necessary and appropriate.

Option 2. Do not approve codified text.

Option 3. Others??

Committee Action – Editorial Changes

Option 1. Give staff and the Council Chair editorial license to make changes to Regulatory Amendment 18 and the codified text and to allow the Council Chair to deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate.

Option 2. Do not approve editorial license.

Option 3. Others??