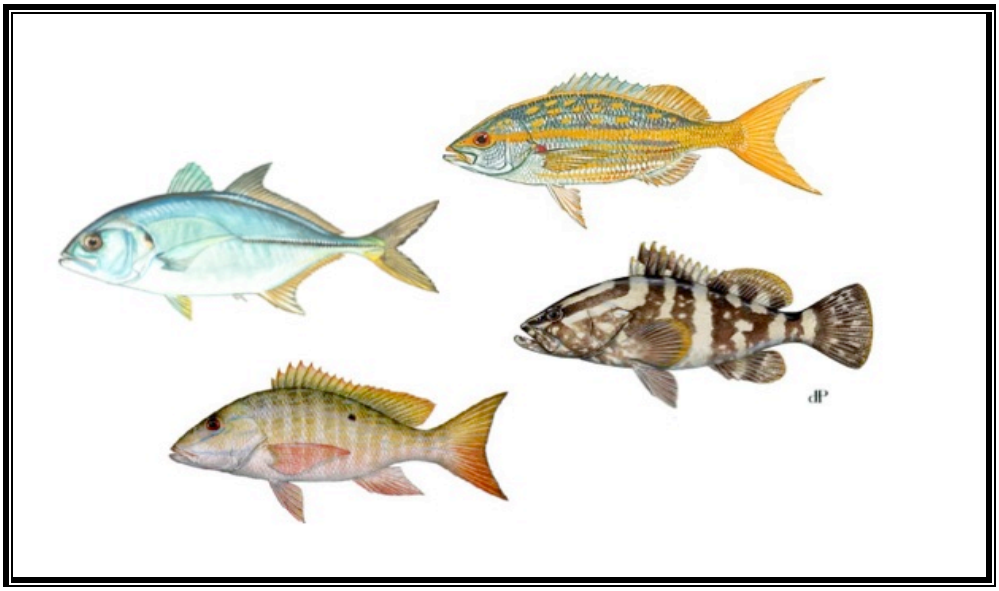

Snapper Grouper Amendment 27

DECISION DOCUMENT

NOVEMBER 2012

Background

What Actions Are Being Proposed?

Amendment 27 would make the South Atlantic Council the responsible entity for management of yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper and Nassau grouper in the southeast U.S.; modify Section I of the Framework Procedure for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Framework) to allow adjustments of the acceptable biological catch (ABC), the annual catch limit (ACL), and the annual catch target (ACT) via notice in the *Federal Register*; and modify placement of blue runner in a fishery management unit and/or modify management measures for blue runner.

Who is Proposing the Actions?

At their September 2012 Council meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) requested development of an FMP amendment to address modification to the placement of blue runner in a Fishery Management Unit (FMU) and/or management measures for blue runner; the jurisdictional management transfer of yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and Nassau grouper; and modification to the snapper grouper framework procedures to allow ABCs, ACLs and ACTs to be adjusted via notice in the *Federal Register*.

Purpose for Action

The *purpose* of Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan is threefold: (1) to establish the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council as the responsible entity for managing yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and Nassau grouper throughout their range in the southeast U.S., and, as such, modify sector allocations, permitting requirements, and recreational regulations as needed; (2) minimize regulatory delay when adjustments to snapper grouper species' Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), and Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) are needed as a result of new stock assessments; and (3) address harvest of blue runner in the mackerel gillnet fishery.

Need for Action

The need of Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan is to respond to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's request for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to assume management of yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper and Nassau grouper in the southeast U.S., to expedite adjustments to ABCs, ACLs, and ACTs for snapper grouper species when a new stock assessment indicates adjustments are warranted, and to minimize socio-economic impacts to mackerel fishermen who harvest and sell blue runner to supplement their income.

Why is the Council and NOAA Fisheries Considering Action?

Yellowtail Snapper, Mutton Snapper, and Nassau Grouper

Both the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf of Mexico Council) and the South Atlantic Council manage yellowtail and mutton snapper in their respective jurisdictions. Because the majority of harvest of these two species takes place in South Atlantic waters, the Gulf of Mexico Council has requested that the South Atlantic Council take over full management of these species throughout their range of occurrence n the southeast U.S. Previously, the South Atlantic Council cited concerns related to permitting issues related to the two different permits required to harvest and sell these species from Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic waters. However, the South Atlantic Council has determined it is appropriate to consider taking over management of yellowtail and mutton snapper, and will also consider options that would establish sector allocations based on the South Atlantic Council's approved allocations methodology, alleviate any permitting conflicts and other requirements that would affect Gulf of Mexico reef fish and South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery participants.

On December 16, 2011, a notice of agency action was published in the *Federal Register* (76 FR 78245), which removed the Gulf of Mexico Council's management authority over Nassau grouper in the Gulf of Mexico. The Gulf of Mexico Council took this action with the intention that the South Atlantic Council would extend their area of jurisdiction for management of Nassau grouper to include federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The South Atlantic Council is addressing the issue of extending its management authority over Nassau grouper to include the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in Amendment 27.

Snapper Grouper Framework Modifications

Currently, the Framework allows ABCs, ACLs, and ACTs to be modified for snapper grouper species via the regulatory amendment process, which most often requires the development of an amendment and associated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents in addition to proposed and final rules with public comment periods. This process can be quite lengthy, and prevents fishery managers from quickly implementing new harvest parameters in response to new scientific information when needed. This lag time between when new information becomes available and when catch levels can be adjusted has the potential to result in adverse impacts on the economic and biological environments. Therefore, the South Atlantic Council is considering an action in Amendment 27 that would allow ABCs, ACLs, and ACTs to be modified by publishing a public notice in the *Federal Register*, eliminating the need for development of a regulatory amendment.

Blue Runner

For many years, South Atlantic mackerel gillnet fishery participants have been selling blue runner caught in gillnets as bycatch to supplement their incomes without having a valid South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit, or a valid South Atlantic 225-pound Snapper Grouper Permit, which is a requirement under the Snapper Grouper FMP. It is likely that mackerel fishery participants were not aware blue runner were included in the snapper grouper fishery management unit, and managed with commercial and recreational ACLs and a restriction is in place on the sale of bag limit caught quantities under the Snapper Grouper FMP. Because some mackerel fishery participants derive up to 30% of their income from the sale of blue runner, the South Atlantic Council is considering taking action to allow

fishermen who capture blue runner as bycatch while using gillnets to fish for South Atlantic mackerel species to be able to legally sell blue runner and thus prevent adverse socio-economic impacts.

Summary of Effects

NOTE: Actions 1-5 would deal with the Gulf of Mexico Council relinquishing management of yellowtail and mutton snapper, which was discussed at their October 2012 Council meeting. At that meeting the Council chairman suggested that a joint steering committee be developed and tasked with developing recommendations for joint management of yellowtail and mutton snapper. The Gulf of Mexico Council did not vote on whether or not to hand over management of yellowtail and mutton snapper to the South Atlantic Council during their October 2012 meeting.

IPT Recommendation: Move Actions 1-5 to the Considered But Rejected Appendix

Action 1. Modify management jurisdiction for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in the southeast region

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the existing management authority of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf of Mexico Council) to manage yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in their respective jurisdictions.

Alternative 2. Designate the South Atlantic Council as the responsible Council that will manage yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic waters.

Biological Effects

The biological effects, if any, of managing a single stock under separate fishery management plans (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) are difficult to quantify. If the South Atlantic Council chose **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, there could be negative biological impacts on the Gulf of Mexico portions of yellowtail and mutton snapper stocks if the Gulf of Mexico Council were to give up management of those species. However, it is likely the Gulf of Mexico Council would retain management of the species until a steering committee, intended to discuss options including a joint amendment for yellowtail and mutton, convenes and makes recommendations as discussed during the October 2012 Gulf of Mexico Council meeting. If the Gulf of Mexico Council retained management of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, there would be no negative biological effects of selecting **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Since there would continue to be separate annual catch limits (ACLs) in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, it is possible an ACL would be met in either region and accountability measures would be triggered. If the South Atlantic Council adopted an overall ACL for the Gulf of Mexico

and South Atlantic, **Alternative 2** would be less likely to trigger an AM than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**; therefore, there could be greater biological effects under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Average yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper commercial, and recreational landings for the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and the combination of the two are shown in **Figures S.1-S.4**. Their respective ACLs are included for comparison.

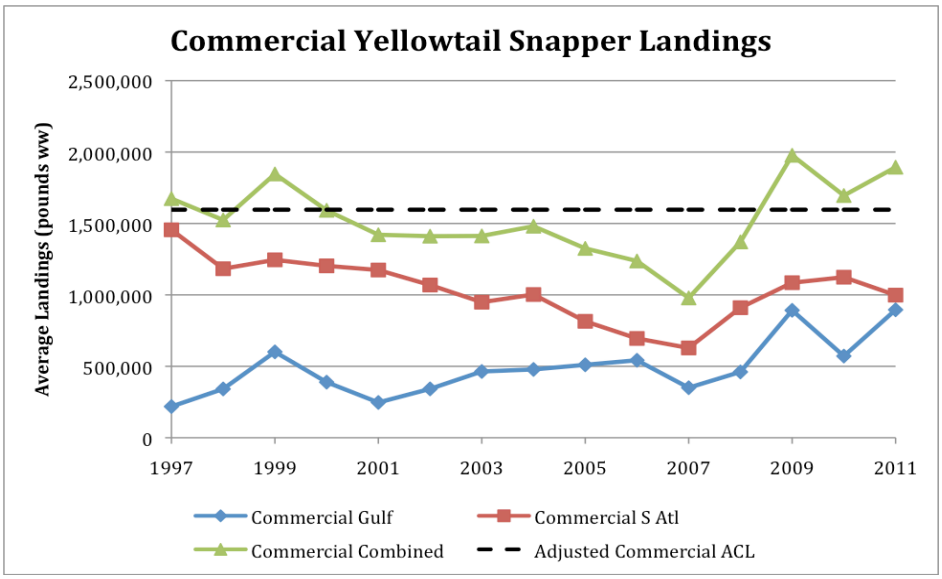

Figure S.1. Average commercial landings of yellowtail snapper from 1997-2011 for the South Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico combined. The dashed line represents the adjusted commercial ACL (based on the 2012 stock assessment).
Source: NMFS SERO

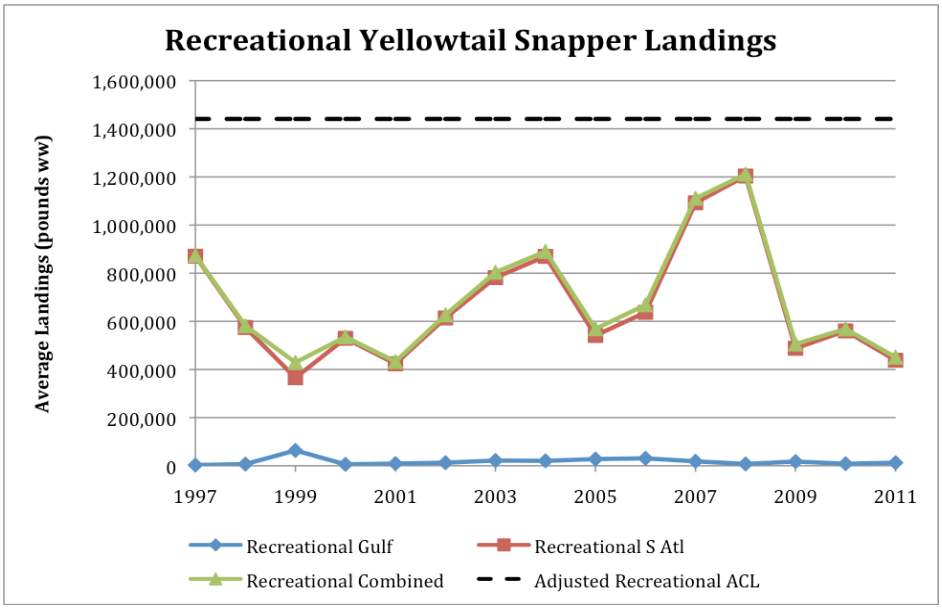

Figure S.2. Average recreational landings of yellowtail snapper from 1997-2011 for the South Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico combined. The dashed line represents the adjusted recreational ACL (based on the 2012 stock assessment).
Source: NMFS SERO

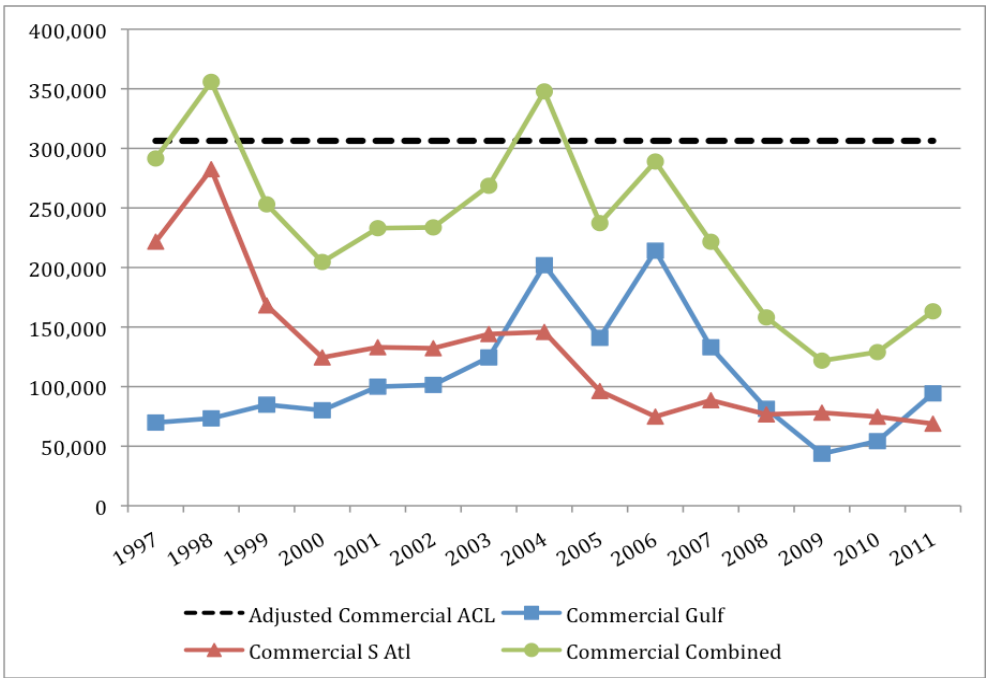

Figure S.3. Average commercial landings of mutton snapper from 1997-2011 for the South Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico combined. The dashed line represents the commercial ACL.
Source: NMFS SERO

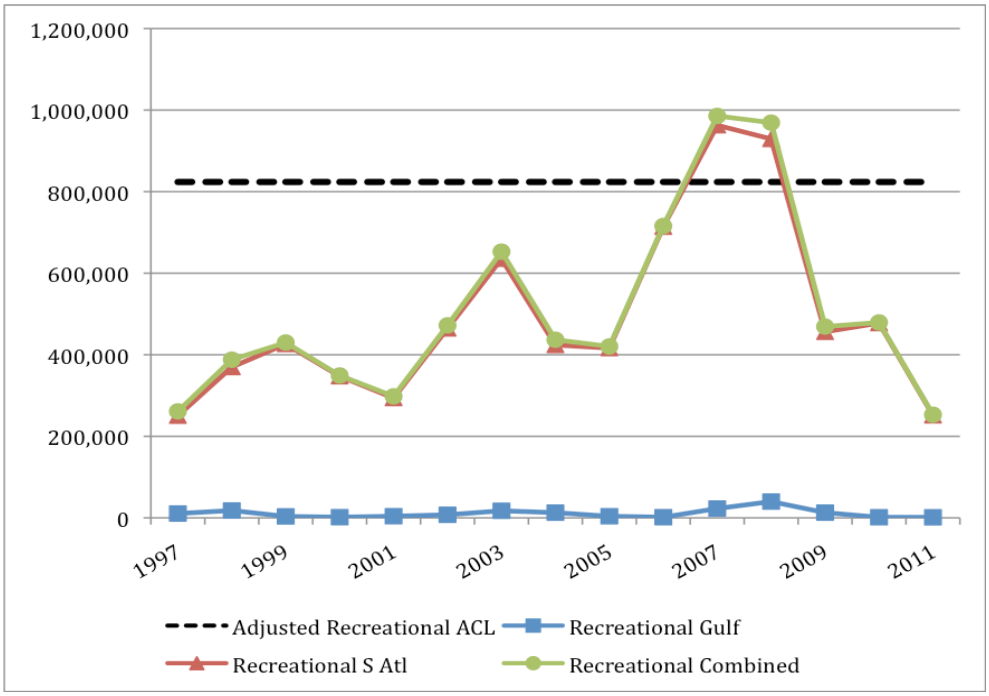

Figure S.4. Average recreational landings of mutton snapper from 1997-2011 for the South Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico combined. The dashed line represents the recreational ACL.
Source: NMFS SERO

Socio-Economic Effects

Action 1 is an administrative action and will have no direct economic effects. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not have any indirect effects either. **Alternative 2** could have indirect economic effects but are impossible to determine without knowing how or if applying the South Atlantic Council's approved allocations formula would change the status quo for a combined management jurisdiction. Single sector ACLs for the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Councils would allow fishermen fishing in either region to continue to harvest yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper until their sector's ACL or annual catch target was caught. This would be a positive economic effect for those fishermen who would have had fishing end sooner in their sector if their share of an uncombined ACL was met. At the same time, it could result in a negative economic effect for those fishermen whose season would close due to the ACL being met sooner if they had separate ACLs.

For yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, separate management would likely result in similar social benefits associated with biological benefits as management by a single council because ACLs and AMs would be in place, and would benefit the stocks by minimizing the risk of overfishing. However, the separate management of commercial and recreational fishing in the Florida Keys presents a challenge to Florida Keys fishermen in that fishing on one side of the island chain or the other falls under different jurisdictions and, in many cases, different regulations. Since most landings of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper occur in the Florida Keys, commercial harvest of these two species in particular may require two permits and additional compliance with other regulations depending on location of harvest.

Administrative Effects

The vast majority of both species are harvested in South Atlantic waters; therefore, maintaining the Gulf of Mexico Council's management authority for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper may be perceived as representing duplicative management effort. In contrast, if the South Atlantic Council were to assume sole management of the two species (**Alternative 2**), one set of management measures could be applied to the total southeast region rather than splitting management measures between two adjacent jurisdictions. This approach to managing the two stocks may be more administratively streamlined, which would result in lower long-term administrative impacts.

Action 2. Modify commercial and recreational sector allocations for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper to be consistent with the transfer in management authority to the South Atlantic Council

Alternative 1 (No Action). Sector allocations for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in the South Atlantic are based on the following formula:

(50% X average of SA landings 1986-2008) + (50% X average of SA landings 2006-2008)

The current sector allocations for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic are 52.56% commercial and 47.44% recreational. The commercial and recreational ACLs are 1,142,589 pounds whole weight (ww) and 1,031,286 pounds ww, respectively.

The current sector allocations for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic are 17.02% commercial and 82.98% recreational. The commercial and recreational ACLs are 157,743 pounds ww and 768,857 pounds ww, respectively.

A single ACL is in place for each of these two species in the Gulf of Mexico. The stock ACL for yellowtail snapper is 725,000 pounds ww, and that for mutton snapper is 203,000 pounds ww.

Alternative 2. Revise sector allocations for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, based on the South Atlantic Council's approved allocations formula, to include landings from Gulf of Mexico waters. The revised formula would be:

(50% X average of SA landings and Gulf landings 1986-2008) + (50% X average of SA and Gulf landings 2006-2008)

Sector allocations would be applicable in both South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico waters.

Biological Effects

Alternative 1 (No Action) would retain a single ACL for mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper in the Gulf of Mexico, and sector specific ACLs for the species in the South Atlantic. If the South Atlantic Council chose to take over management of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper (**Alternative 2**) under **Action 1**, but the Gulf of Mexico's portion of the mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper ACLs were not integrated into the overall ACL, these species would not attain the optimum yield because the ACL would be set too low. **Alternative 2** would add the Gulf of Mexico portion of the ACLs for mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper to the overall ACL for these species and would

employ the South Atlantic Council's approach to allocate the ACL between commercial and recreational sectors in Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic federal waters. Both species would continue to be managed according to their status as revealed in the most current stock assessment and existing AMs would ensure landings remain below the ACL. Therefore, there would be no direct biological impacts to the stocks. Based on the data included in **Tables S.1** and **S.2**, the sector ACLs that would result from applying the sector allocation formula under **Alternative 2** are calculated in **Tables S.3** and **S.4**.

Table S.1 Mutton and yellowtail snapper commercial sector landings in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic combined from 1986-2011

Year	Mutton Snapper	Yellowtail snapper
1986	410,832	1,118,820
1987	554,451	1,364,070
1988	449,904	1,412,576
1989	517,266	1,851,536
1990	454,089	1,755,613
1991	484,030	1,861,642
1992	400,337	1,855,666
1993	445,178	2,378,819
1994	357,632	2,205,485
1995	285,131	1,856,930
1996	291,489	1,458,935
1997	291,515	1,673,880
1998	355,833	1,524,553
1999	252,995	1,846,372
2000	204,621	1,592,138
2001	233,007	1,420,857
2002	233,665	1,410,880
2003	268,617	1,412,629
2004	347,799	1,480,530
2005	237,245	1,325,336
2006	288,954	1,237,195
2007	221,584	978,687
2008	158,096	1,370,892
2009	121,811	1,977,206
2010	128,979	1,695,506
2011	163,222	1,893,851

Source: NMFS SERO

Table S.2 Mutton and yellowtail snapper recreational sector landings in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic combined from 1986-2011

Year	Mutton Snapper	Yellowtail snapper
1986	722,591	1,163,636
1987	511,865	1,008,836
1988	1,240,250	1,412,438
1989	856,472	2,942,984
1990	828,000	1,906,081
1991	893,000	3,755,651
1992	1,210,008	1,462,954
1993	698,696	1,560,755
1994	644,201	1,293,754
1995	503,295	895,337
1996	413,483	741,862
1997	261,135	873,475
1998	387,876	581,445
1999	429,914	429,108
2000	349,120	535,164
2001	297,979	432,570
2002	472,102	626,623
2003	652,747	803,656
2004	436,788	890,288
2005	420,287	568,787
2006	715,707	668,090
2007	985,618	1,110,938
2008	969,142	1,211,259
2009	469,086	505,619
2010	479,188	568,466
2011	252,837	450,760

Source: NMFS SERO

After applying the data included in **Table S.3** to incorporate average landings of yellowtail snapper from the Gulf of Mexico for 1986-2008 into the South Atlantic Council's allocation formula (Boyle's Law), results in sector allocations of 53.03% commercial and 43.97% recreational. For mutton snapper (**Table S.4**.), the sector allocations would be 27.11% commercial and 72.89% recreational **(Table S.5).**

Table S.3. Input data for applying Boyle's law to determine yellowtail snapper sector allocations (pounds whole weight).

Region	Sector	Ave. 1986-2008	Ave. 2006-2008
Gulf of Mexico	Commercial	625,979	450,962
Gulf of Mexico	Recreational	20,577	18,889
Gulf of Mexico	Total	646,556	469,850
South Atlantic	Commercial	956,370	744,630
South Atlantic	Recreational	1,147,931	977,874
South Atlantic	Total	2,104,301	1,722,503
Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic Combined	Commercial	1,582,350	1,195,591
Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic Combined	Recreational	1,168,508	996,762
Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic Combined	Total	2,750,858	2,192,354

Source: NMFS SERO

Table S.4 Input data for applying Boyle's law to determine mutton snapper sector allocations (pounds whole weight).

Region	Sector	Ave. 1986-2008	Ave. 2006-2008
Gulf of Mexico	Commercial	164,179	142,847
Gulf of Mexico	Recreational	23,551	21,484
Gulf of Mexico	Total	187,730	164,331
South Atlantic	Commercial	172,528	80,031
South Atlantic	Recreational	624,287	868,672
South Atlantic	Total	796,815	948,703
Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic Combined	Commercial	336,707	222,878
Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic Combined	Recreational	647,838	890,156
Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic Combined	Total	984,545	1,113,034

Source: NMFS SERO

Table S.5 Current and adjusted sector allocations for yellowtail and mutton snapper.

Current sector allocations (*South Atlantic only*)		**Adjusted sector allocations (South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico combined)**	
Yellowtail	**Mutton**	**Yellowtail**	**Mutton**
52.56% commercial 47.44% recreational	17.02% commercial 82.98% recreational	56.03% commercial 43.97% recreational	27.11% commercial 72.89% recreational

Source: NMFS SERO

Socio-Economic Effects

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** there could be negative direct economic effects should the South Atlantic Council assume management of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, but not combine the ACLs from both the South Atlantic Council and Gulf Council. Under that scenario, fishermen under both Councils' jurisdictions would only be able to fish under the South Atlantic ACL. Should the South Atlantic Council assume management of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper and combine the ACLs from both the South Atlantic Council and the Gulf of Mexico Council, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not be feasible unless the ACL was in some way partitioned between the two Council jurisdictions. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not have indirect economic effects. **Alternative 2**, which will apply the SAFMC allocation formula to a single ACL combined from both Councils may have indirect effects, but currently indeterminate, as the South Atlantic Council's sector allocations for the two species may not match the historical commercial and recreational sector landings in the Gulf Council region.

Social benefits from consistency in catch limits would result for both regions, particularly for the Florida Keys fishermen under **Alternative 2**. The designation of recreational and commercial ACLs for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper under **Alternative 2** may have some negative impacts on fishermen harvesting in the Gulf of Mexico region because there are currently no allocations between the sectors for these two species. **Alternative 2** would address these issues by adding Gulf of Mexico landings data to the South Atlantic landings data to re-calculate what the new sector allocations would be.

Administrative Effects

There would be no change in the administrative effects of establishing sector specific ACLs for the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic combined for these species. Commercial and recreational ACLs are currently being monitored for both species in the South Atlantic, and a single ACL is being monitored in the Gulf of Mexico.

Action 3. Address cross-jurisdictional permit issues for harvest of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in the southeast region

Alternative 1 (No Action). The Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Permit is required for the commercial harvest of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper from the Gulf of Mexico's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and the South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit or 225 Snapper Grouper Permit is required for the commercial harvest of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper from the South Atlantic EEZ. The Gulf of Mexico Charter/Headboat Reef Fish Permit is required to recreationally harvest yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in Gulf of Mexico federal waters from a charter or headboat, and the South Atlantic Charter/Headboat Permit for Snapper Grouper is required for recreational harvest of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in South Atlantic federal waters from a charter or headboat.

Alternative 2. The South Atlantic Council will continue to allow commercial harvest of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in the Gulf of Mexico under the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Permit and the recreational harvest of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in the Gulf of Mexico from a charter or headboat under the Gulf of Mexico Charter/Headboat Reef Fish Permit. Commercial harvest of these species in South Atlantic waters will continue to require a commercial Snapper Grouper Unlimited Permit or 225 Snapper Grouper Permit and recreational harvest from a charter or headboat will continue to require a South Atlantic Charter/Headboat Permit for Snapper Grouper.

Biological Effects

This action addresses administrative changes and would not result in any biological impacts. The amount of fishing pressure on the species would not be altered by this action.

Socio-Economic Effects

Assuming the South Atlantic Council takes over management for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 2** of this action would allow fishermen to continue to harvesting these species using the same permits as before. Thus, there would be no impacts as there would be no change. However, if the South Atlantic Council assumes management of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper and does not choose **Alternative 2** as their preferred alternative, no harvest of either species would be allowed commercially without the Unlimited or 225 pound South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Permit, or the South Atlantic Charter/Headboat Permit for Snapper Grouper.

If the South Atlantic Council assumes management for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in the Gulf of Mexico, not choosing **Alternative 2** could disenfranchise fishermen from the Gulf of Mexico who do not already own or do not subsequently purchase two South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permits. The net economic loss to Gulf of Mexico fishermen could be made up by South Atlantic permitted fishermen provided the South Atlantic fishermen could harvest all of the fish allowed under the ACLs for both species.

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, there would be no permit requirement and harvest would be open to anyone (if the South Atlantic Council takes over management of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in the Gulf of Mexico). Without a federal commercial permit, some reporting requirements would no longer exist, which could lead to negative impacts on the stock, increased fishing effort, and inconsistent provisions for permitted and non-permitted fishermen. **Alternative 2** would specify permit requirements when fishing in each region, but would not change the required permits that are held by fishermen in these regions at this time. This would likely have minimal impact on the commercial and for-hire fleets because it would maintain status quo. However, **Alternative 2** would not reduce the burden of the requirement for two federal commercial permits for fishermen who target yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper in both the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, particularly for fishermen in the Florida Keys who may harvest on both sides on a daily or regular basis.

Administrative Effects

Because **Alternative 2** would not require issuance of new permits, or require permit transfers specifically related to this action, little to no administrative impact would be expected.

Action 4. Modify recreational management measures for yellowtail snapper to be consistent with the transfer in management authority to the South Atlantic Council

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the current Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic commercial and recreational regulations for yellowtail snapper. In the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper have a 12-inch total length (TL) commercial and recreational minimum size limit, and are included in the 10 snapper per person per day aggregate bag limit.

Alternative 2. Remove yellowtail snapper from the South Atlantic aggregate recreational bag limit and establish one southeast region recreational bag limit for yellowtail snapper.

Sub-Alternative 2a. Establish a southeast region yellowtail snapper recreational bag limit of 2 fish per person per day.

Sub-Alternative 2b. Establish a southeast region yellowtail snapper recreational bag limit of 5 fish per person per day.

Sub-Alternative 2c. Establish a southeast region yellowtail snapper recreational bag limit of 7 fish per person per day.

Biological Effects

If the South Atlantic Council did not take over management of yellowtail snapper under **Action 1**, then **Alternative 1 (No Action)** under the current action would simply retain the status quo with yellowtail snapper being included in the Gulf of Mexico snapper aggregate and the South Atlantic snapper aggregate. If the South Atlantic Council were to take over management of yellowtail snapper under **Action 1** and choose **Alternative 1 (No Action)** under this action, the species would be removed from the Reef Fish FMU and yellowtail snapper would have no management measures in the Gulf of Mexico. This could allow harvest of yellowtail snapper in the Gulf of Mexico to increase and cause ACLs and AMs to be implemented faster than they would be if a recreational bag limit were to be implemented. In order to avert this situation, a single bag limit that would be applicable in both South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico federal waters would need to be specified for yellowtail snapper. **Sub-Alternatives 2a-2c** would each specify a single bag limit. In general, the larger the bag limit the faster the recreational ACL may be harvested and the more likely AMs would be triggered. Regardless of which bag limit is chosen, recreational harvest is limited to the ACL; therefore, no negative biological impacts would be expected under **Alternative 2**.

Socio-Economic Effects

The more yellowtail snapper allowed in a bag limit, the less of a potential economic effect there might be for recreational anglers. Benefits to fishermen and affiliated fishing communities and businesses would be associated with the biological benefits of a management measure such as a lower bag limit. For fishermen who target and catch yellowtail snapper in both the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic, particularly the Florida Keys fishermen and visiting anglers, there would be expected benefits of one bag limit. In most cases, a potentially lower bag limit (**Alternative 2**) would be expected to have negative impacts on the recreational sector, including impacts to for-hire businesses and reducing recreational opportunities to fish for yellowtail snapper, a popular recreational species. However, yellowtail snapper recreational catch per trip tends to be only a few fish.

Administrative Effects

Administratively, making this change is not a significant undertaking and would require minimal staff time and administrative expense to implement since it is just one part of a suite of actions contained in Amendment 27 that would, if approved, be implemented together. Enforcement of the current snapper aggregate bag limit already occurs in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Regions. Under **Alternative 2**, the enforcement effort currently dedicated to monitoring the aggregate snapper bag limit would shift slightly to include enforcement of an individual bag limit for yellowtail snapper, which may or may not be harvested concurrently with other snapper species that would remain in the aggregate bag limit.

Action 5. Modify management measures for mutton snapper to be consistent with the transfer in management authority to the South Atlantic Council

Alternative 1 (No Action). In the South Atlantic and in the Gulf of Mexico mutton snapper have a 16-inch TL commercial and recreational minimum size limit and are part of the 10 snappers per person per day aggregate bag limit. For mutton snapper in the South Atlantic, the commercial sector is limited to 10 fish per person per day or per trip, whichever is more restrictive, during May and June.

Alternative 2. Remove mutton snapper from the South Atlantic aggregate recreational bag limit and establish one southeast region recreational bag limit for mutton snapper.

Sub-Alternative 2a. Establish a southeast region mutton snapper recreational bag limit of 1 fish per person per day.

Sub-Alternative 2b. Establish a southeast region mutton snapper recreational bag limit of 2 fish per person per day.

Sub-Alternative 2c. Establish a southeast region mutton snapper recreational bag limit of 3 fish per person per day.

Alternative 3. Extend the commercial May and June harvest restriction for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic into Gulf of Mexico waters. Commercial harvest of mutton snapper during May and June would be limited to 10 per person per day or 10 per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

Biological Effects

If the South Atlantic Council did not take over management of mutton snapper under Action 1, then **Alternative 1 (No Action)** under the current action would simply retain the status quo with mutton snapper being included in the Gulf of Mexico snapper aggregate and the South Atlantic snapper aggregate. If the South Atlantic Council were to take over management of mutton snapper under Action 1 and choose **Alternative 1 (No Action)** under this action, the species would be removed from the Reef Fish FMU and mutton snapper would have no management measures in the Gulf of Mexico. This could allow harvest of mutton snapper in the Gulf of Mexico to increase and cause ACLs and AMs to be implemented faster than they would be if a recreational bag limit were to be implemented. In order to avert this situation, a single bag limit that would be applicable in both South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico federal waters would need to be specified for mutton snapper. **Sub-Alternatives 2a-2c** would each specify a single bag limit. In general, the larger the bag limit the faster the recreational ACL may be harvested and the more likely AMs would be triggered. Regardless of which bag limit is chosen, recreational harvest is limited to the ACL; therefore, no negative biological impacts would be expected under **Alternative 2.** Extending the commercial restriction on harvest of mutton snapper during May and June each year into Gulf of Mexico waters

would result in biological benefits to the stock and possibly other snapper species that co-occur with mutton snapper.

Socio-Economic Effects

Only **Alternative 2** would have potential economic impacts on the recreational sector. Under **Alternative 2**, mutton snapper would be removed from the 10 snapper per person per day aggregate bag limit, and have three bag limit sub-alternatives. The more mutton snapper allowed in a separate bag limit, the less of a potential economic effect there might be for recreational anglers.

Benefits to the fishermen and affiliated fishing communities and businesses would be associated with the biological benefits of a management measure such as a lower bag limit. For fishermen who target and catch mutton snapper in both the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic, particularly the Florida Keys fishermen and visiting anglers, there would be expected benefits of one bag limit for fishing both sides of the Keys. In most cases, a potentially lower bag limit (**Alternative 2**) would be expected to have negative impacts on the recreational sector, including impacts to for-hire businesses and reducing recreational opportunities to fish for mutton snapper a popular recreational species. However, mutton snapper recreational catch per trip tends to be only a few fish.

Administrative Effects

Administratively, making this change is not a significant undertaking and would require minimal staff time and administrative expense to implement since it is just one part of a suite of actions contained in Amendment 27 that would, if approved, be implemented together. Enforcement of the current snapper aggregate bag limit already occurs in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Regions. Under **Alternative 2,** the enforcement effort currently dedicated to monitoring the aggregate snapper bag limit would shift slightly to include enforcement of an individual bag limit for mutton snapper, which may or may not be harvested concurrently with other snapper species that would remain in the aggregate bag limit. **Alternative 3** is a management measure that is already in place for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic, and under this action, if chosen as a preferred alternative, would be extended into Gulf of Mexico waters. Extending the commercial May-June harvest restriction of mutton snapper into the Gulf of Mexico may alleviate cross-jurisdictional enforcement issues during those months. **Alternative 3** would require enforcement of the two-month commercial harvest restriction in an area where it was not previously required; however, applying this management measure to both regions may eliminate questions of enforceability along the jurisdictional boundary between the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic, which may in turn reduce enforcement-related concerns in the long-term.

Action 6. Extend the South Atlantic Council's area of jurisdiction for management of Nassau grouper to include the Gulf of Mexico

Alternative 1 (No Action). Nassau grouper harvest is prohibited in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. The South Atlantic Council's area of jurisdiction for management of Nassau grouper is limited to federal waters of the South Atlantic.

Alternative 2. The South Atlantic Council would extend its jurisdictional authority for management of Nassau grouper to include federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Harvest of Nassau grouper in the Gulf of Mexico EEZ would continue to be prohibited.

SNAPPER GROUPER AP RECOMMENDATION: The Council should request that NMFS thoroughly research the historical distribution of Nassau grouper and known spawning aggregations in the South Atlantic.

Biological Effects

Alternative 1 (No Action) would not allow for the South Atlantic Council to manage Nassau grouper as required. However, there is no sunset date associated with the delayed effectiveness outlined in the notice of agency action. Therefore, under **Alterative 1 (No Action)** the current harvest prohibition in the Gulf of Mexico would remain. If the South Atlantic Council were to choose **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, future adjustments to commercial and recreational harvest levels for Nassau grouper could not be made in the Gulf of Mexico. Nassau grouper has been under a harvest moratorium since 1992 (SAFMC 1991) due to concerns of overexploitation. The current ACL for Nassau grouper in both the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico is equal to 0. **Alternative 2** is an administrative action and no changes in the biological effects would be expected as the alternative would simply allow for the South Atlantic Council to continue the harvest prohibition for Nassau grouper in the Gulf of Mexico and would given them authority to allow some level of harvest in the Gulf of Mexico in the future if needed. If the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction for Nassau grouper extends to Gulf of Mexico, it is expected that there will be no economic effects as Nassau grouper are not currently targeted, nor can they be harvested in either the South Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico.

Socio-Economic Effects

The current ACL for Nassau grouper on both the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico is equal to 0. If the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction for Nassau grouper extends to Gulf of Mexico, it is expected that there will be no economic effects as Nassau grouper are not currently targeted, nor can they be harvested in either the South Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico.

Because of the moratorium on harvest of Nassau grouper in both the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic regions, there is no difference in expected impacts on fishermen or fishing communities when considering separate management (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) or management by the South Atlantic Council (**Alternative 2**).

Administrative Effects

Administrative impacts of extending management of Nassau grouper into the Gulf of Mexico would be negligible since the status quo already includes a prohibition on harvest of the species in or from the Gulf of Mexico.

Action 7. Modify Section I of the Snapper Grouper FMP Framework procedure

Alternative 1 (No Action). Section I of the snapper grouper framework procedure, as modified through Amendment 17B, is as follows:

I. Snapper Grouper FMP Framework Procedure for Specification of Annual Catch Limits, Annual Catch Targets, Overfishing Limits, Acceptable Biological Catch, and annual adjustments:

Procedure for Specifications:

1. At times determined by the SEDAR Steering Committee, and in consultation with the Council and NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO), stock assessments or assessment updates will be conducted under the SEDAR process for stocks or stock complexes managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP. Each SEDAR stock assessment or assessment update will: a) assess to the extent possible the current biomass, biomass proxy, or SPR levels for each stock; b) estimate fishing mortality (F) in relation to F_{MSY} (MFMT) and F_{OY}; c) determine the overfishing limit (OFL); d) estimate other population parameters deemed appropriate; e) summarize statistics on the fishery for each stock or stock complex; f) specify the geographical variations in stock abundance, mortality recruitment, and age of entry into the fishery for each stock or stock complex; and g) develop estimates of B_{MSY}.

2. The Council will consider SEDAR stock assessments or other documentation the Council deems appropriate to provide the biological analysis and data listed above in paragraph 1. Either the SEFSC or the stock assessment branch of a state agency may serve as the lead in conducting the analysis, as determined by the SEDAR Steering Committee. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will prepare a written report to the Council specifying an OFL and may recommend a range of ABCs for each stock complex that is in need of catch reductions for attaining or maintaining OY. The OFL is the annual harvest level corresponding to fishing at MFMT (F_{MSY}). The ABC range is intended to provide guidance to the SSC and is the OFL as reduced due to scientific uncertainty in order to reduce the probability that overfishing will occur in a year. To the extent practicable, the probability that overfishing will occur at various levels of ABC and the annual transitional yields (i.e., catch streams) calculated for each level of fishing mortality within the ABC range should be included with the recommended range.

For overfished stocks, the recommended range of ABCs shall be calculated so as to end overfishing and achieve snapper grouper population levels at or above B_{MSY} within the rebuilding periods specified by the Council and approved by NOAA Fisheries Service. The SEDAR report or SSC will recommend rebuilding

periods based on the provisions of the National Standard Guidelines, including generation times for the affected stocks. Generation times are to be specified by the stock assessment panel based on the biological characteristics of the individual stocks. The report will recommend to the Council a B_{MSY} level and a MSST from B_{MSY}. The report may also recommend more appropriate estimates of F_{MSY} for any stock. The report may also recommend more appropriate levels for the MSY proxy, OY, the overfishing threshold (MFMT), and overfished threshold (MSST). For stock or stock complexes where data are inadequate to compute an OFL and recommended ABC range, the SSC will use other available information as a guide in providing their best estimate of an OFL corresponding to MFMT and ABC range that should result in not exceeding the MFMT.

3. The SSC will examine SEDAR reports or other new information, the OFL determination, and the recommended range of ABC. In addition, the SSC will examine information provided by the social scientists and economists from the Council staff and from the SERO Fisheries Social Science Branch analyzing social and economic impacts of any specification demanding adjustments of allocations, ACLs, ACTs, AMs, quotas, bag limits, or other fishing restrictions. The SSC will use the ABC control rule to set their ABC recommendation at or below the OFL, taking in account scientific uncertainty. If the SSC sets their ABC recommendations equal to OFL, the SSC will provide its rational why it believes that level of fishing will not exceed MFMT.

4. The Council may conduct a public hearing on the reports and the SSC's ABC recommendation at, or prior, to the time it is considered by the Council for action. Other public hearings may be held also. The Council may request a review of the report by its Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and optionally by its socioeconomic experts and convene these groups before taking action.

5. The Council, in selecting an ACL, ACT, AM, and a stock restoration time period, if necessary, for each stock or stock complex for which an ABC has been identified, will, in addition to taking into consideration the recommendations and information provided for in paragraphs 1, 2, 3, and 4, utilize the following criteria:

> **a.** Set ACL at or below the ABC specified by the SSC or set a series of annual ACLs at or below the projected ABCs in order to account for management uncertainty. If the Council sets ACL equal to ABC, and ABC has been set equal to OFL, the Council will provide its rationale as to why it by it believes that level of fishing will not exceed MFMT.
>
> **b.** May subdivide the ACLs into commercial, for-hire, and private recreational sector ACLs that maximize the net benefits of the fishery to the nation. The Sector ACLs will be based on allocations determined by criteria established by the Council and specified by the Council through a plan amendment. If, for an overfished stock, harvest in any year exceeds

the ACL or sector ACL, management measure and catch levels for that sector will be adjusted in accordance with the AMs established for that stock.

c. Set ACTs or sector ACTs at or below ACLs and in accordance with the provision of the AM for that stock. The ACT is the management target that accounts for management uncertainty in controlling the actual catch at or below the ACL. If an ACL is exceeded repeatedly, the Council has the option to establish an ACT if one does not already exist for a particular stock and adjust or establish AMs for that stock as well.

6. The Council will provide the SSC specification of OFL; SSC recommendation of ABC; and its recommendations to the NOAA Fisheries Service Regional Administrator for ACLs, sector ACLs, ACTs, sector ACTs, AMs, sector AMs, and stock restoration target dates for each stock or stock complex, estimates of B_{MSY} and MSST, estimates of MFMT, and the quotas, bag limits, trip limits, size limits, closed seasons, and gear restrictions necessary to avoid exceeding the ACL or sector ACLS, along with the reports, a regulatory impact review and proper National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation, and the proposed regulations within a predetermined time as agreed upon by the Council and Regional Administrator. The Council may also recommend new levels or statements for MSY (or proxy) and OY.

7. The Regional Administrator will review the Council's recommendations and supporting information, and, if he concurs that the recommendations are consistent with the objectives of the FMP, the National Standards, and other applicable law, he shall forward for publication notice of proposed rules to the Assistant Administrator (providing appropriate time for additional public comment). The Regional Administrator will take into consideration all public comment and information received and will forward for publication in the *Federal Register* of a final rule within 30 days of the close of the public comment, or such other time as agreed upon by the Council and Regional Administrator.

8. Appropriate regulatory changes that may be implemented by final rule in the *Federal Register* include:

- **a.** ACLs or sector ACLs, or a series of annual ACLs or sector ACLs.
- **b.** ACTs or sector ACTs, or a series of annual ACTs or sector ACTs and establish ACTs for stocks which do not have an ACT.
- **c.** AMs or sector AMs.
- **d.** Bag limits, size limits, vessel trip limits, closed seasons or area, gear restrictions, and quotas designed to achieve OY and keep harvest levels from exceeding the ACL or sector ACL.
- **e.** The time period specified for rebuilding an overfished stock, estimated MSY and MSST for overfished stocks, and MFMT.
- **f.** New levels or statements of MSY (or proxy) and OY for any stock.
- **g.** New levels of total allowable catch (TAC).

h. Adjust fishing seasons/years.

9. The NMFS Regional Administrator is authorized, through notice action, to conduct the following activities.

- **a.** Close the commercial fishery of a snapper grouper species or species group that has a commercial quota or sub-quota at such time as projected to be necessary to prevent the commercial sector form exceeding its sector ACL or ACT for the remainder of the fishing year or sub-quota season.
- **b.** Close the recreational fishery of a snapper grouper species or species group at such time as projected to be necessary to prevent recreational sector ACLs or ACTs from being exceeded.
- **c.** Reopen a commercial or recreational season that had been prematurely closed if needed to assure that a sector ACL or ACT can be reached.

10. If NMFS decides not to publish the proposed rule for the recommended management measures, or to otherwise hold the measures in abeyance, then the Regional Administrator must notify the Council of its intended action and the reasons for NMFS concern along with suggested changes to the proposed management measures that would alleviate the concerns. Such notice shall specify: 1) The applicable law with which the amendment is inconsistent; 2) the nature of such inconsistencies; and 3) recommendation concerning the action that could be taken by the Council to conform the amendment to the requirements of applicable law.

Alternative 2. Modify Section I of the Snapper Grouper FMP Framework Procedure for Specification of Annual Catch Limits, Annual Catch Targets, Overfishing Limits, Acceptable Biological Catch, and annual adjustments. The modification would add the following language:

Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) Adjustment Procedure

1. Stock assessments will continue to be conducted for snapper grouper species in the management area through the SEDAR process.
2. Following the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)'s review of the stock assessment and a public hearing, the Council will determine if changes are needed in the OFL, ABC, ACLs, and ACTs and so advise the Regional Director (RD).
3. Following a review for consistency with the FMP and applicable law, the RD may reject or may implement changes by notice in the *Federal Register* to be effective for the next fishing season.

MOTION: THE SNAPPER GROUPER AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 2 AS A PREFERRED

Biological Effects

This administrative action could have indirect positive biological effects in that adjustments to harvest levels would not be subject to regulatory delays as is currently the case under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. As such, biological benefits would result in that appropriate levels of harvest could be set quickly in response to the latest scientific information in order to maintain harvest levels at or below the ACL.

Socio-Economic Effects

Alternative 1 (No Action) could negatively impact the recreational and commercial fishing sectors should new data indicate that a stock had improved but the South Atlantic Council had no means to rapidly increase the ACL, resulting in loss of opportunity, income, and/or recreational angling experiences. However, if an assessment indicated a substantial decrease in the ACL was needed **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would retain a more deliberative process of ensuring the public was well informed regarding the needed changes in catch levels. **Alternative 2** would have indirect economic effects on the fishery that could be negative or positive proportionate the level of increase or decrease of the ACL being adjusted under the new framework process. **Alternative 2** would be expected to be beneficial to fishermen and communities by allowing for timeliness in the regulatory process and providing a route for the South Atlantic Council to make faster adjustments to ACLs and minimize negative social and economic impacts. When stock assessments indicate ACLs can be increased quick adjustments for ACLs would allow for positive social and economic effects without negatively impacting the sustainability of the stock. When stock assessments indicate large decreases in the ACLs are needed, a quick adjustment to the catch level would likely have positive biological effects but there would likely be negative social effects with moving quickly with a decrease in a catch level without a great deal of public involvement. Additionally, changing the process to allow for timely adjustments could reduce uncertainty associated with older data, and may improve public perception of management by allowing the South Atlantic Council to adjust harvest levels quickly after new information becomes available.

Administrative Effects

Alternative 2 would allow ABC, ACLs, AMs, and ACTs to be modified via *Federal Register* notice based on new scientific information. This would benefit the administrative environment by eliminating the lengthy regulatory amendment process.

Action 8. Modify placement of blue runner in a fishery management unit and/or modify management measures for blue runner

Alternative 1 (No Action). Blue runner is managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP. A federal South Atlantic Unlimited or 225 Snapper Grouper Permit is required to commercially harvest and sell blue runner. A federal Commercial Dealer Permit is required to purchase blue runner. The commercial ACL for blue runner is 188,329 pounds whole weight (ww) and the commercial allocation is 15% of the total ACL. If the commercial ACL is met or is projected to be met, all subsequent purchase and sale is prohibited. If the commercial ACL is exceeded, the Regional Administrator will publish a notice to reduce the ACL in the following season by the amount of the overage, but only if the species is overfished.

The recreational ACL for blue runner is 1,101,612 ww. There is a recreational annual catch target (ACT) for blue runner, which equals ACL*(1-percent standard error) or ACL*0.5, whichever is greater. If the annual recreational landings exceed the recreational ACL in a given year the following year's landings will be monitored in-season for persistence in increased landings. The Regional Administrator will publish a notice to reduce the length of the recreational fishing season as necessary.

Alternative 2. Remove blue runner from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit and place in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Unit.

Alternative 3. Retain blue runner in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan but allow commercial harvest of blue runner with a gillnet for vessels that have been issued a Spanish mackerel Permit. Require a blue runner endorsement for Spanish mackerel-permitted vessels for the commercial harvest and sale of blue runner.

Alternative 4. Retain blue runner in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan but exempt it from the Snapper Grouper permit requirement for purchase, harvest, and sale.

Alternative 5. Remove blue runner from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit in order for the state of Florida to assume management responsibilities for the species.

SNAPPER GROUPER AP RECOMMENDATION:
MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS REMOVING BLUE RUNNER FROM THE SG FISHERY MANAGEMENT UNIT
APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

SSC RECOMMENDATION: ACL for Blue Runner is rather high compared to the landings in gillnets. The SSC would like to see this again in April with more analyses and in a more finalized format.

IPT RECOMMENDATION: Remove highlighted text from Alternative 2 and delete Alternative 5 since Council cannot dictate whether Florida should manage the species and removing blue runner from the FMU is already addressed in Alternative 2.

Alternative 2. Remove blue runner from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit and place in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Unit.

~~**Alternative 5.** Remove blue runner from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit in order for the state of Florida to assume management responsibilities for the species.~~

Biological Effects

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action),** blue runner would continue to be part of the Snapper Grouper FMU. Only fishermen with a valid South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit or 225 Permit would be legally allowed to harvest them commercially and only dealers with a valid commercial Snapper Grouper Dealer Permit would be allowed to purchase and sell blue runner. However, South Atlantic commercial snapper grouper and mackerel fishermen do not commonly target blue runner. Blue runner constituted less than 3% of the total commercial snapper grouper harvest in the South Atlantic from 2000 to 2011 **(Table S.6).** Similarly, blue runner made up less than 3% if the total Spanish mackerel and king mackerel landings for the South Atlantic.

Table S.6. Total annual landings (pounds whole weight) of snapper grouper species, mackerel (king and Spanish), and total landings of blue runner (pounds whole weight) in the South Atlantic from 2000 to 2011.

Year	Total snapper grouper	Total Mackerel	Total blue runner	Percent SG blue runner	Percent Mackerel blue runner
2000	9,314,188	6,092,744	156,832	1.68%	2.57%
2001	8,759,531	6,074,566	158,453	1.81%	2.61%
2002	8,276,934	5,581,737	132,756	1.60%	2.38%
2003	6,421,749	6,563,229	108,412	1.69%	1.65%
2004	9,002,185	6,963,918	149,080	1.66%	2.14%
2005	8,104,573	7,009,838	128,773	1.59%	1.84%
2006	7,433,209	7,912,722	155,450	2.09%	1.96%
2007	7,440,210	7,636,726	130,939	1.76%	1.71%
2008	8,553,781	7,188,949	192,593	2.25%	2.68%
2009	8,959,344	8,549,078	259,387	2.90%	3.03%
2010	8,402,187	8,843,515	223,954	2.67%	2.53%
2011	7,981,696	7,514,259	237,028	2.97%	3.15%

Source: NMFS SERO

The biological effects of removing blue runner from the Snapper Grouper FMU and instead managing it under the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMU, as proposed under

Alternative 2, would not be significant as long as landings of this species remained below the established ACL. Allowing mackerel fishermen to harvest blue runner, in addition to snapper grouper fishermen, could result in the commercial ACL being met earlier during the fishing year. Neither **Alternatives 3** nor **4** propose changes that would result in biological impacts to the blue runner stock in the South Atlantic. Both alternatives propose administrative changes to allow the harvest of bluer runner to continue as it has been taking place for over a decade. Hence, no significant impacts over the status quo would be expected.

Out of all the commercial trips with hook-and-line gear that landed at least one pound of blue runner between 2007 and 2011, 51% and 49% also landed other snapper grouper species and king mackerel, respectively. Spanish mackerel were landed on 28% of the trips (**Figure S.5**).

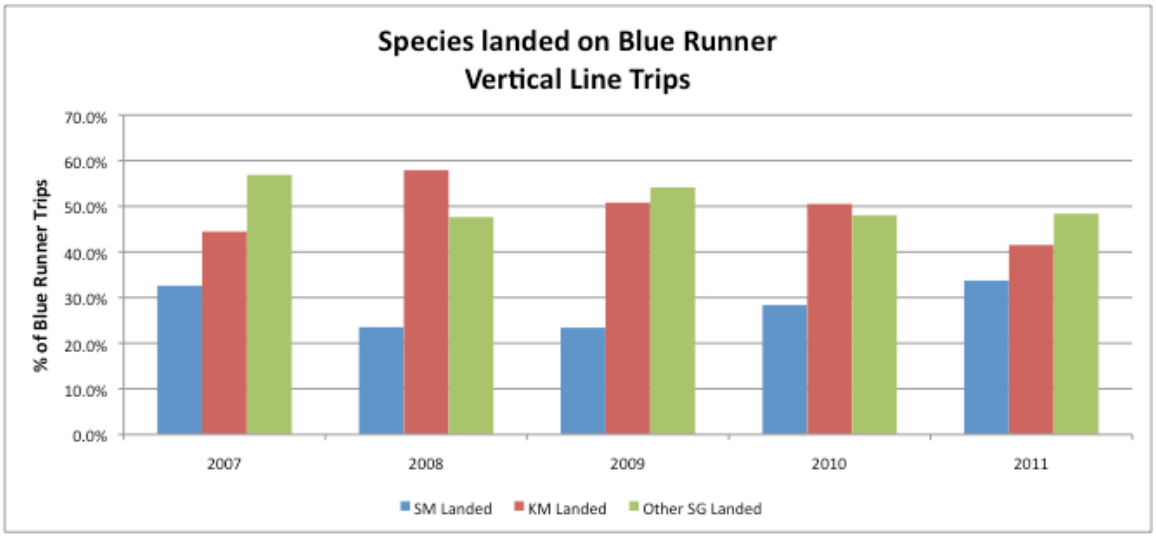

Figure S.5. Percentage of mackerel and other snapper grouper species landed with hook-and-line on trips that caught at least one pound of blue runner in the South Atlantic between 2007 and 2011.
Source: NMFS SERO

On the other hand, out of all the commercial trips with gillnet gear that landed at least one pound of blue runner between 2007 and 2011, 90% or greater also landed Spanish mackerel (**Figure S.6**). An examination of commercial logbook landings shows most blue runner are taken with hook and line gear; however, a large component are taken with gillnets (**Figure S.7**). Gillnets, however, are not included in the allowable gear to harvest snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic.

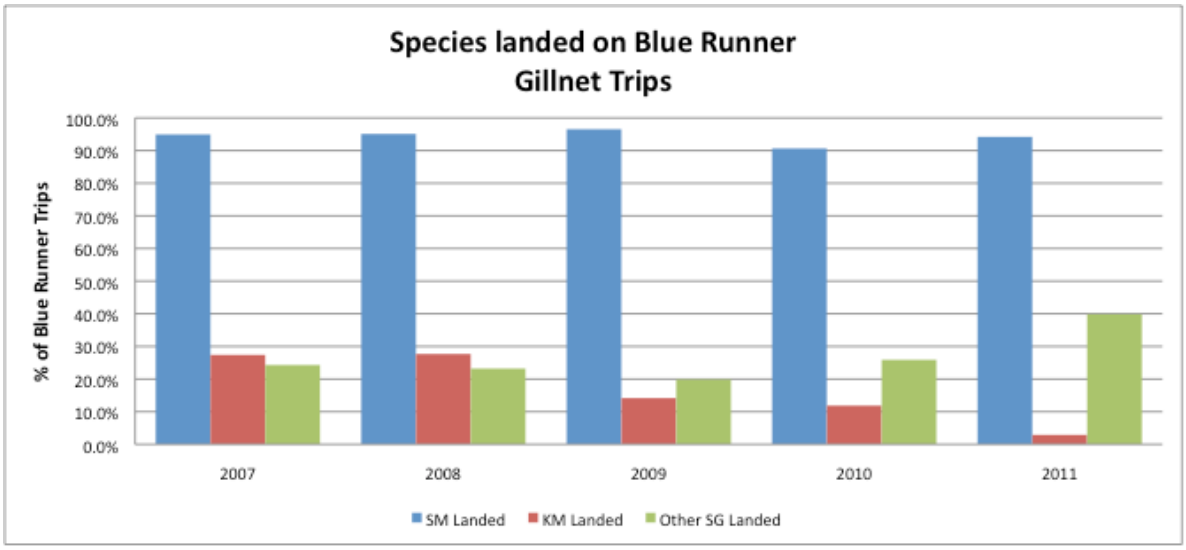

Figure S.6. Percentage of mackerel and other snapper grouper species landed with gillnet gear on trips that caught at least one pound of blue runner in the South Atlantic between 2007 and 2011.
Source: NMFS SERO

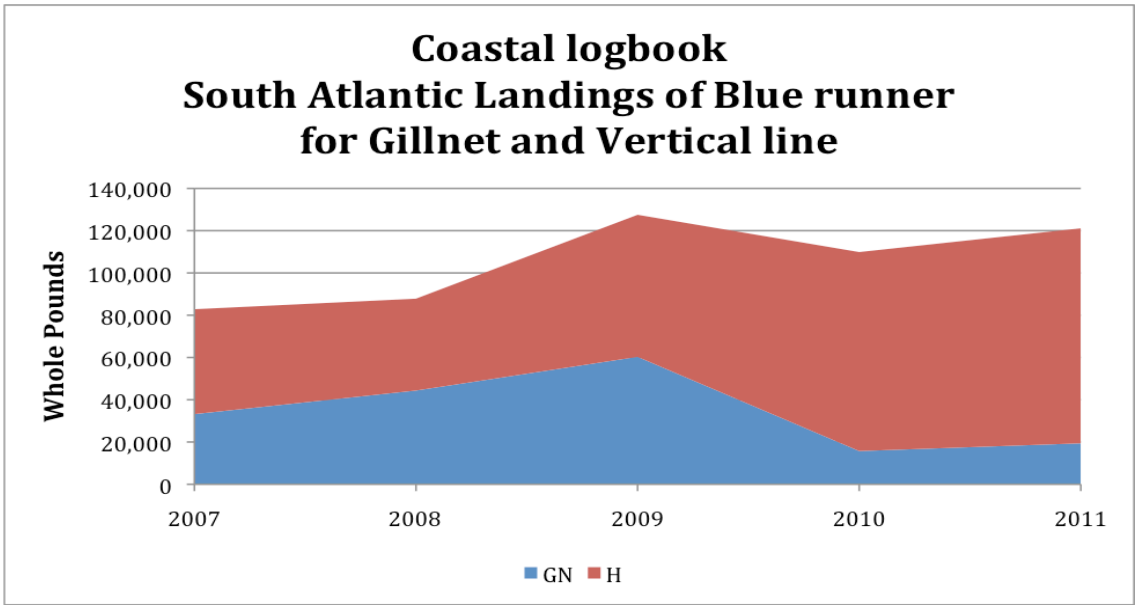

Figure S.7 Percentage of blue runner landed with gillnet and vertical line gear in the South Atlantic between 2007 and 2011.
Source: NMFS SERO

Table S.7 shows total annual commercial landings of blue runner as from two sources: the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's Coastal Fisheries Logbook Program (CFLP) and the Accumulated Landings System (ALS). These two programs are the main source of commercial landings statistics in the southeast region. A comparison of the landings reveals that only an average of 60% of total annual blue runner landings were captured in the CFLP over the past 12 years. The remaining 40% of landings that are reported via trip tickets can be attributed to non-federally permitted fishermen.

Table S.7. Total annual landings of blue runner (pounds whole weight) as reported through the Coastal Fisheries Logbook Program (CLFP) and the Accumulated Landings System (trip ticket data) from 2000 to 2011.

Year	Logbook Landings	Trip Ticket Landings	% of total reported to CFLP
2000	82,582	156,832	52.7%
2001	105,355	158,453	66.5%
2002	85,614	132,756	64.5%
2003	75,544	108,412	69.7%
2004	108,024	149,080	72.5%
2005	80,685	128,773	62.7%
2006	91,250	155,450	58.7%
2007	89,161	130,939	68.1%
2008	99,042	192,593	51.4%
2009	132,082	259,387	50.9%
2010	122,221	223,954	54.6%
2011	131,451	237,028	55.5%

Source: NMFS SERO

Alternative 1 (No Action) would retain blue runner in the Snapper Grouper FMP. Fishermen who do not have a South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Permit would not be able to retain blue runner, and blue runner incidentally caught with gillnet would have to be discarded. Blue runner has not been assessed in the South Atlantic and the current ABC, as recommended by the South Atlantic SSC, is set at the third highest average landings between 1999 and 2008. The ABC for this species is 1,289,941 pounds ww, 15% of which is allocated to the commercial sector. Total commercial landings of blue runner in the South Atlantic, as indicated by trip ticket (ALS) data in **Table S.7**, have been above the current commercial ACL of 188,329 pounds ww since 2008. However, the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011c), implemented in April 2012, put in place in-season and post-season AMs to ensure that harvest does not exceed the ACL specified for this species. **Figure S.7** shows that about 20,000 to 30,000 pounds ww of blue runner landings have been harvested with gillnet, which is not an allowable gear type under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. If **Alternative 1 (No Action)** were selected, there is a greater chance the ACL would not be met.

The biological effects of removing blue runner from the Snapper Grouper FMU and instead managing it under the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMU, as proposed under **Alternative 2**, would not be significant as long as landings of this species remained below the established ACL. The species is neither a "snapper" nor a "grouper" but a member of the Jacks family. The species was originally included in the snapper grouper FMU because it was thought to co-occur with other, more economically desirable, species. Placement of species in distinct management units does not necessarily have to be done according to how closely-related species are within a FMU. Management units, such as snapper grouper, can also be designed around ecological attributes. According to mackerel fishermen, blue runner are usually harvested during the spring months, when they are mixed in with schools of Spanish mackerel. As the season progresses, however, blue runner apparently move elsewhere and fishermen report a very "clean" harvest of Spanish mackerel thereafter. Evidently, there is some ecological association, albeit

temporary, between blue runners and Spanish mackerel. This would tend to support placing blue runner in the same FMU as Spanish mackerel, as proposed under **Alternative 2**. However, not enough scientific information is currently available to support this association.

Neither **Alternatives 3** or **4** propose changes that would result in biological impacts to the blue runner stock in the South Atlantic. Both alternatives propose administrative changes to allow the harvest of bluer runner to continue as it has been taking place for over a decade. Hence no significant impacts over the status quo would be expected.

Socio-Economic Effects

Blue runner are primarily landed in the Spanish mackerel, king mackerel and snapper grouper fisheries. However, blue runner are not caught on all Spanish mackerel gill net trips. They tend to be caught primarily in the fall fishery and occasionally in the spring (**Table S.8**). In 2010 and 2011, more pounds of blue runner were caught on trips on trips with Spanish mackerel where hook and line was the primary gear. Blue runner never comprised more than about 10% of the total pounds and value on trips where both blue runner and Spanish mackerel were caught. On trips where gears other than gill net or hook and line were used, blue runner tended to make up a smaller portion of the trips.

Table S.8. Landings, nominal (not inflated) value, price per pound of blue runner and Spanish mackerel for those trips where at least 1 lb of blue runner and 1 lb of Spanish mackerel were landed, 2007-2011.

Year	Gear	Trips	Lbs BR	Value BR	Lbs SM	Value SM	Trip lbs	Trip Value	% lbs BR	% Value BR
2007	Gill Net	582	32,533	$ 31,285	482,800	$393,350	1,228,698	$950,438	5%	5%
	Hook and Line	544	15,849	$ 15,274	184,107	$160,342	441,740	$431,852	7%	6%
	Other	110	3,610	$ 3,580	47,534	$ 38,259	123,119	$112,711	5%	5%
2008	Gill Net	425	43,304	$ 39,700	299,790	$289,430	842,881	$739,085	7%	7%
	Hook and Line	443	12,527	$ 11,277	142,964	$127,558	356,590	$361,932	6%	5%
	Other	196	3,995	$ 3,639	103,667	$101,451	236,399	$236,594	5%	5%
2009	Gill Net	559	59,097	$ 49,333	304,646	$302,536	920,479	$787,380	10%	10%
	Hook and Line	505	15,176	$ 13,799	133,900	$116,909	389,550	$420,969	7%	6%
	Other	107	1,691	$ 1,556	55,366	$ 45,099	123,690	$106,465	3%	3%
2010	Gill Net	245	15,040	$ 15,012	129,584	$125,688	384,120	$328,223	7%	8%
	Hook and Line	745	27,902	$ 26,138	247,712	$196,740	742,328	$773,438	5%	5%
	Other	264	5,827	$ 5,680	187,492	$143,230	429,627	$356,527	4%	4%
2011	Gill Net	241	14,775	$ 14,628	79,011	$102,966	311,401	$310,610	6%	6%
	Hook and Line	989	34,775	$ 34,680	363,090	$325,236	946,566	$995,599	6%	5%
	Other	218	3,296	$ 3,342	93,081	$ 80,645	215,359	$200,443	3%	3%

Source: NMFS SEFSC Coastal Fisheries Logbook (2012)

More pounds of blue runner were caught along with Spanish mackerel than with king mackerel (**Table S.9**). Except in 2007, more than 30,000 lbs of blue runner were caught on trips where at least 1 lb of king mackerel was caught. On trips where both blue runner and king mackerel were caught, the percent of the landings comprised by blue runner ranged from an average of 2 to 8%. The value of blue runner on those trips average 2 to 7% of the entire trip value.

Table S.9 Landings, nominal (not inflated) value, price per pound of blue runner and king mackerel for those trips where at least 1 lb of blue runner and 1 lb of king mackerel were landed, 2007 – 2011.

Year	Gear	Trips	Lbs BR	Value BR	Lbs KM	Value KM	Trip lbs	Trip Value	% lbs BR	% Value BR
2007	Gill Net	166	8,199	$ 7,936	10,689	$ 19,652	407,695	$ 347,075	4%	5%
	Hook and Line	744	16,790	$ 17,219	105,032	$ 203,658	416,557	$ 767,151	8%	6%
	Other	228	2,537	$ 2,267	42,978	$ 88,889	113,680	$ 200,662	4%	2%
2008	Gill Net	124	14,946	$ 13,064	11,090	$ 22,425	302,373	$ 290,790	6%	6%
	Hook and Line	1,085	18,249	$ 15,887	266,224	$ 482,421	713,093	$ 1,248,999	5%	3%
	Other	343	5,016	$ 4,217	96,819	$ 179,511	250,650	$ 411,494	3%	2%
2009	Gill Net	82	7,907	$ 6,391	1,798	$ 3,708	152,224	$ 135,870	7%	7%
	Hook and Line	1,105	21,550	$ 20,778	288,253	$ 428,152	778,711	$ 1,151,398	4%	2%
	Other	273	2,377	$ 2,166	69,202	$ 105,894	159,501	$ 231,295	3%	2%
2010	Gill Net	33	3,281	$ 3,403	1,202	$ 2,107	63,236	$ 55,525	6%	7%
	Hook and Line	1,325	25,124	$ 26,888	361,961	$ 632,706	998,488	$ 1,613,448	4%	3%
	Other	545	5,072	$ 5,709	180,801	$ 332,315	423,931	$ 713,671	2%	2%
2011	Gill Net	conf.*	conf.	conf.	conf.	conf.	conf.	conf.	conf.	conf.
	Hook and Line	1,213	29,135	$ 35,922	229,147	$ 516,774	827,955	$ 1,599,991	5%	4%
	Other	419	4,876	$ 6,692	94,011	$ 210,115	248,581	$ 463,981	3%	3%

Source: NMFS SEFSC Coastal Fisheries Logbook (2012)
*Indicates the data are confidential.

The number of trips in which blue runner were landed on the same trip as snapper grouper species was similar to that of the number of trips in which they were landed with king mackerel (**Table S.10**). However, more pounds of blue runner tend to be landed with snapper grouper species than with either of the mackerel species. The value of blue runner landed on trips where at least 1 lb of blue runner was landed as well as at least 1 lb of snapper grouper species were landed ranged from 3 to 10%. The value of the blue runner on those trips ranged from an average of 3 to 8% of the total trip value.

Table S.10. Landings, value, price per pound of blue runner and snapper grouper species for those trips where at least 1 lb of blue runner and 1 lb of snapper grouper were landed, 2007-2011.

Year	Gear	Trips	Lbs BR	Value BR	Lbs SG	Value SG	Trip lbs	Trip Value	% lbs BR	% Value BR
2007	Gill Net	145	7,739	$ 7,378	3,608	$ 2,480	316,719	$ 253,348	3%	4%
	Hook and Line	918	28,362	$ 27,538	245,265	$ 672,049	543,348	$ 1,073,844	10%	7%
	Other	81	2,597	$ 2,538	7,286	$ 15,518	52,051	$ 67,508	6%	4%
2008	Gill Net	101	16,153	$ 14,271	4,570	$ 3,018	234,547	$ 202,677	8%	8%
	Hook and Line	823	21,313	$ 18,837	254,341	$ 666,134	535,891	$ 1,067,309	8%	5%
	Other	150	5,922	$ 5,533	20,717	$ 55,603	138,151	$ 227,834	5%	4%
2009	Gill Net	113	9,366	$ 8,232	3,815	$ 3,014	201,759	$ 158,180	5%	5%
	Hook and Line	1,162	38,089	$ 42,315	476,903	$ 1,177,706	855,777	$ 1,653,932	8%	3%
	Other	101	1,750	$ 1,739	12,162	$ 31,526	60,324	$ 95,962	5%	5%
2010	Gill Net	68	5,492	$ 5,484	3,108	$ 2,332	130,721	$ 110,071	6%	6%
	Hook and Line	1,223	64,326	$ 58,356	519,954	$ 1,327,667	1,121,945	$ 2,032,080	7%	5%
	Other	188	3,840	$ 3,835	23,587	$ 53,155	182,295	$ 252,513	4%	4%
2011	Gill Net	106	7,439	$ 7,819	7,537	$ 4,706	168,503	$ 163,210	5%	5%
	Hook and Line	1,394	66,434	$ 68,088	803,527	$ 2,301,105	1,337,440	$ 2,979,027	8%	5%
	Other	159	3,026	$ 3,361	12,738	$ 28,728	120,763	$ 168,865	4%	4%

Source: NMFS SEFSC Coastal Fisheries Logbook (2012)

Blue runner has been landed in the past on trips where no snapper grouper species were present. Some of the fishermen who had trips that landed blue runner but snapper grouper species may in fact have a South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Permit. **Table S.11** gives an indication that there are roughly 1,500 to 2,200 trips per year between 2007 and

2011 in which no snapper grouper were landed with blue runner. These trips landed between 48,563 and 82,014 pounds annually with a 2011 value of $51,846 to $74,279.

Table S.11. Landings and value of blue runner landed on trips where there were no snapper grouper complex species landed, 2007-2011.

Year	Trips	Pounds	Nominal Value	Inflated Value (2011)
2007	1,509	50,822	$ 49,412	$ 53,605
2008	1,809	55,654	$ 50,312	$ 52,563
2009	1,802	82,914	$ 70,844	$ 74,279
2010	2,233	48,563	$ 50,260	$ 51,846
2011	2,178	53,238	$ 58,400	$ 58,400

Source: NMFS SEFSC Coastal Fisheries Logbook (2012)

Removing blue runner from the Snapper Grouper FMU to allow the species to be added to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMU (**Alternative 2**) would be beneficial to fishermen without Snapper Grouper permits who harvest blue runner with gillnet because it would not require an additional permit and would allow them to continue harvest of blue runners with gillnet gear. This would also be expected to have no negative impacts on fishermen with Snapper Grouper permits who harvest blue runner with hook and line as long as there were no permit requirements implemented should blue runner become part of the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMU.

Alternative 3 may negatively impact fishermen who catch blue runner in the Spanish mackerel gillnet fishery because of the provision for a blue runner endorsement on the Spanish mackerel commercial permit, particularly if there is a limited number of endorsements and possible administrative fees. **Alternative 4** would not place the additional burden on gillnet fishermen of acquiring a Snapper Grouper permit but would also not remove the gillnet prohibition for harvest of species in the Snapper Grouper FMU, which could negatively impact small fishing businesses that depend on the blue runner gillnet landings during part of the year.

Removing blue runner from the Snapper Grouper FMU to allow Florida to assume management (**Alternative 5**) would allow continued harvest of blue runner with hook and line or gillnet without additional permit requirements. **Alternative 5** would be expected to result in minimal or no impact on fishermen harvesting blue runner with either gear type by maintaining status quo of current fishing and sale of blue runner.

Administrative Effects

Alternative 4 is the least administratively burdensome alternative under consideration for this action. Under this alternative, blue runner would not need to be added or removed from any South Atlantic FMP, nor would any changes to the current permit program need to be made. Regulations would simply be modified to eliminate the requirement, which stipulates that blue runner may only be commercially harvested,

purchased, or sold, by entities holding a valid South Atlantic Unlimited or 225 pound Snapper Grouper Permit. **Alternative 4** would require only the development of constituent outreach materials informing them of the change to the regulations, and publication of a proposed and final rule, if the action is approved for implementation by the Secretary of Commerce. Administrative impacts of **Alternative 5** are similar to those under **Alternative 2**, which would also remove blue runner from the Snapper Grouper FMU; however, the state of Florida would be responsible for developing regulations to manage blue runner rather than the Council developing an FMP amendment to add the species to another FMU.