



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

South Atlantic Headboat Effort Update

June 2025



Issue

Council was concerned with vessel based bag limits for the headboat component of the recreational sector. Staff provided some background in December 2024 and Southeast Region Headboat Staff provided requested information.

Dec
2024

Description of the
Headboat Fishery

Trends in Effort

Common Species
Caught

Catch Per Unit Effort
for Select Species

Requested
Information

Changes in Effort:
Capacity, Vessel
Length, Minimum
Number of
Passengers,

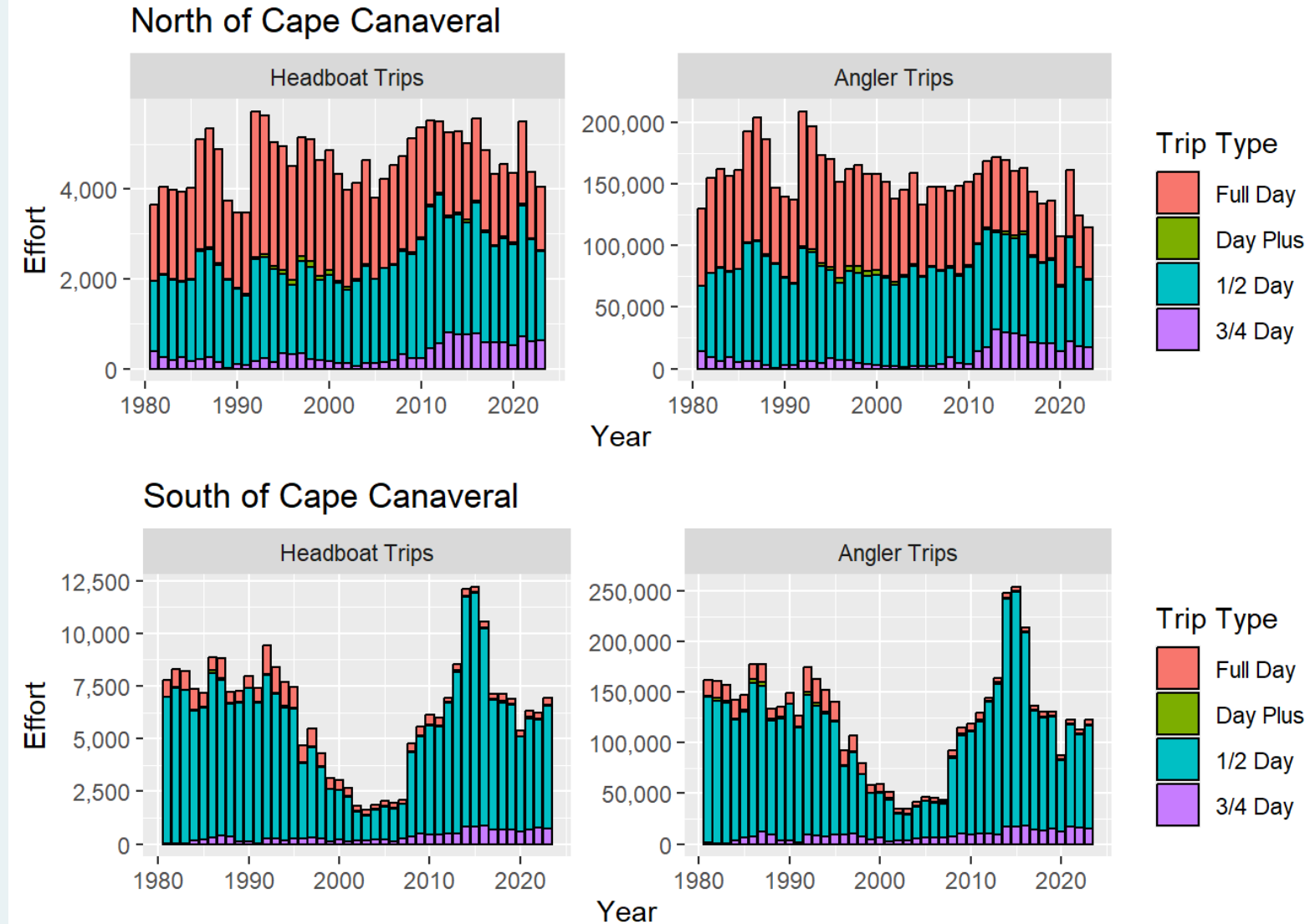
Information on
Species Composition
and Depth Fished

Maps of Vessel
Location

Trends in Effort

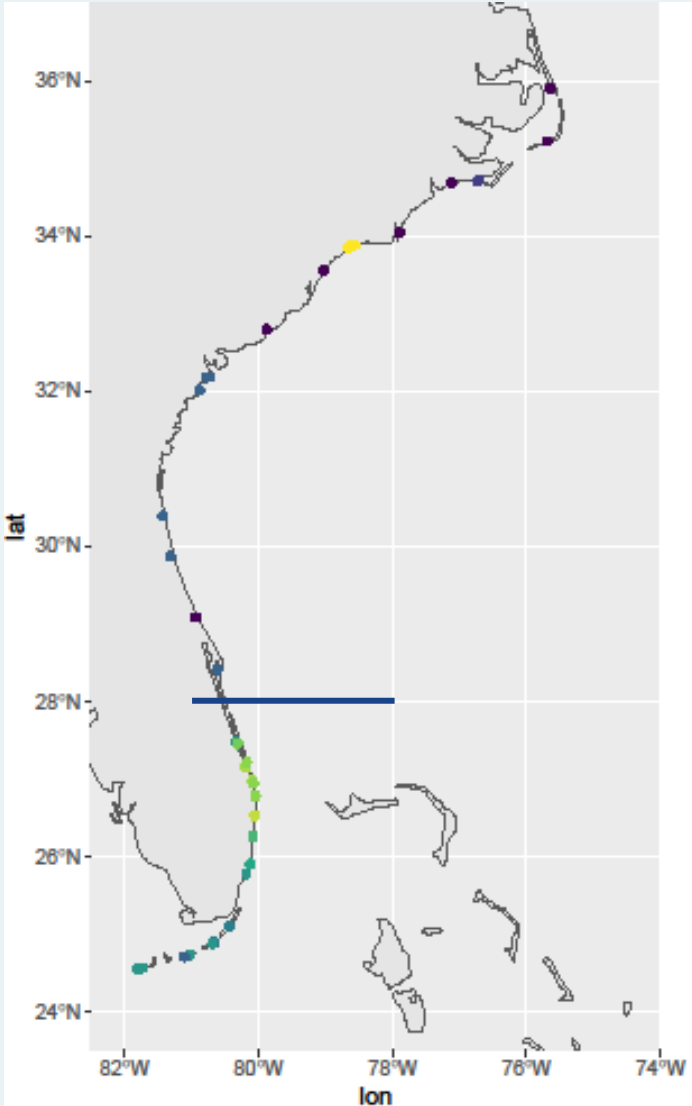
- Effort Varied North and South of Cape Canaveral
- North of Cape Canaveral
 - More Full Day Trips
 - Trips Decreasing
- South of Cape Canaveral
 - Mostly 1/2 Trips
 - Effort has varied

Source: [December 2024 Full Council 1 Attachment 6](#)




Common Species Caught

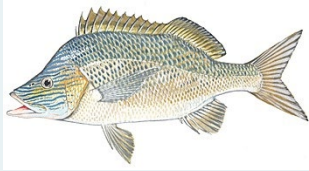
Source: [December 2024 Full Council 1 Attachment 6](#)



Vermilion Snapper

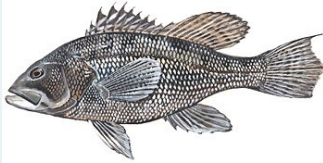






Most Common




White Grunt

Tomtate




Black Sea Bass


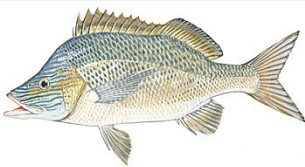


Red Porgy

Yellowtail Snapper



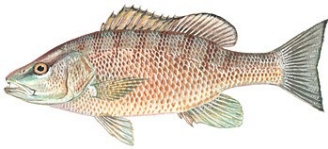


Most Common




White Grunt Lane Snapper

Gray Snapper



Vermilion Snapper



Percent of Trips Full:

Has the number of passengers on headboats changed?

- Best Metric: 95th Percentile
- Mean around 50% full
- No discernable trend in percent full.

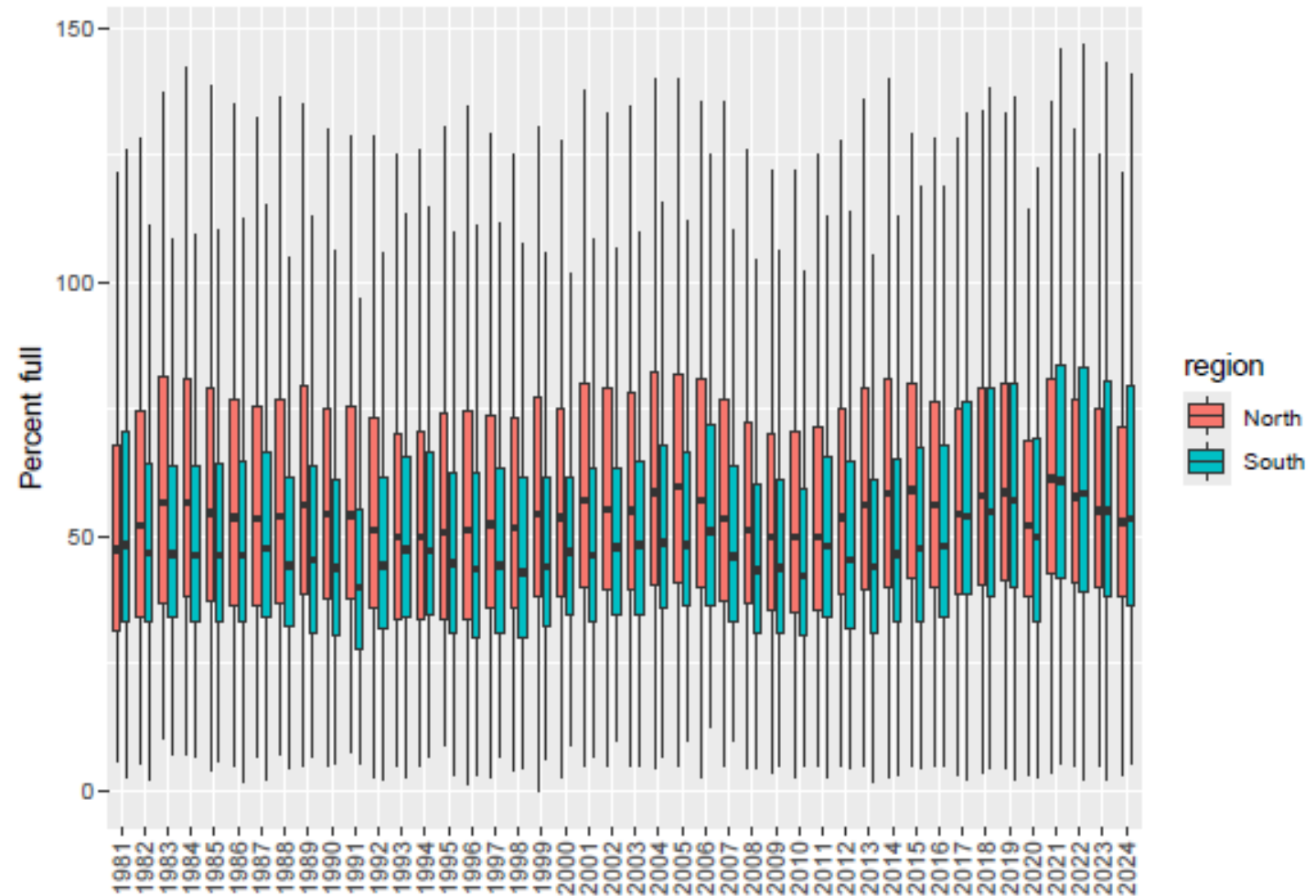


Figure 5: Comparison of anglers relative to capacity for trips in the Southeast US Atlantic by region (outliers not plotted).

Vessel Length:

Has the fleet changed in capacity of anglers over time?

- Mean length of vessels was ~ 60 feet
- Change occurred around 2018 in both regions
- Minor changes in vessel length since 2007

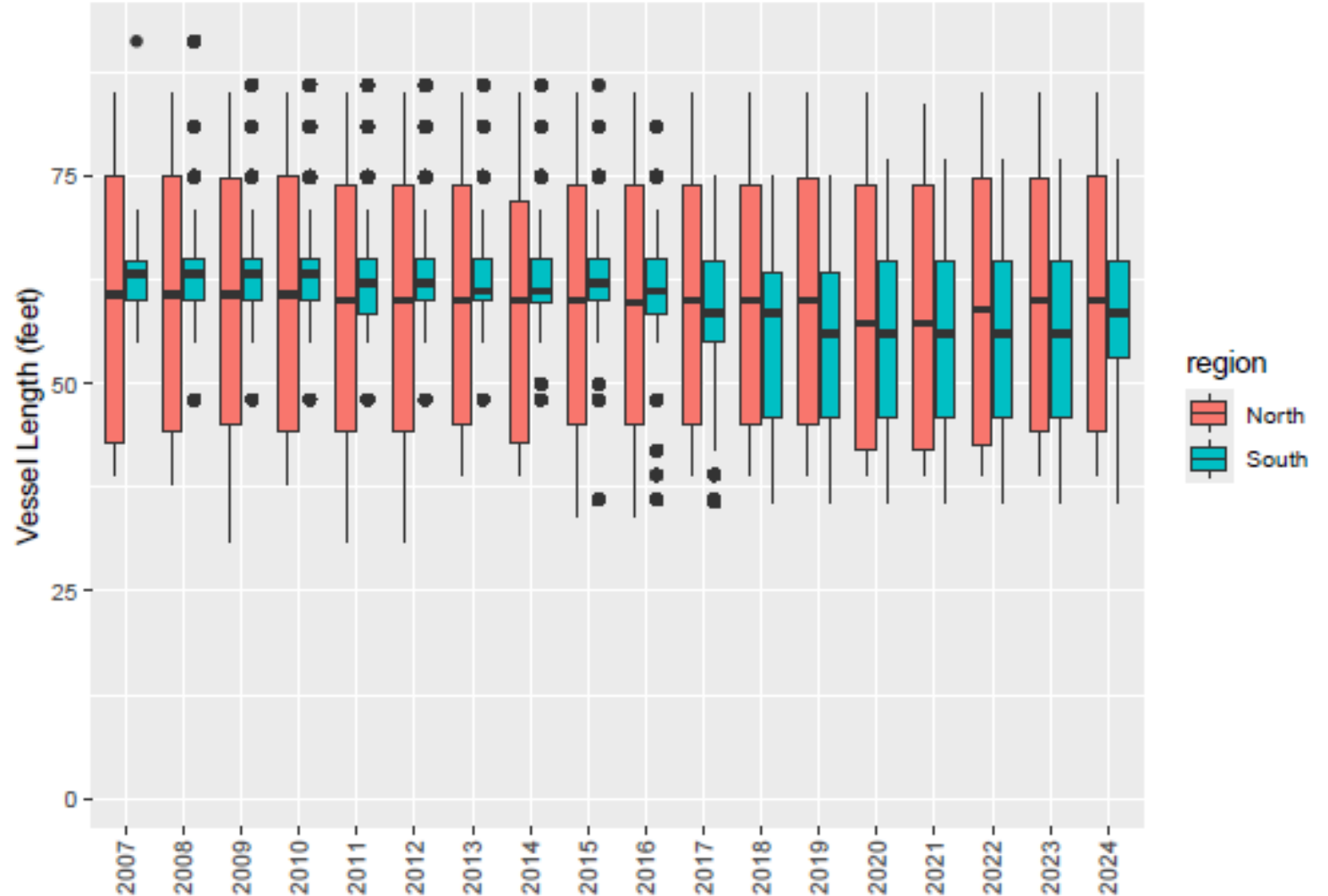


Figure 10: Comparison of vessel length in the Southeast US Atlantic by region.

Minimum Passengers:

Are vessels now needing to carry more passengers to leave the dock?

- Calculated as 5th percentile for each vessel and year
- Minimum capacity varied around with no trend
- Most years minimum capacity was between 20 and 30% full

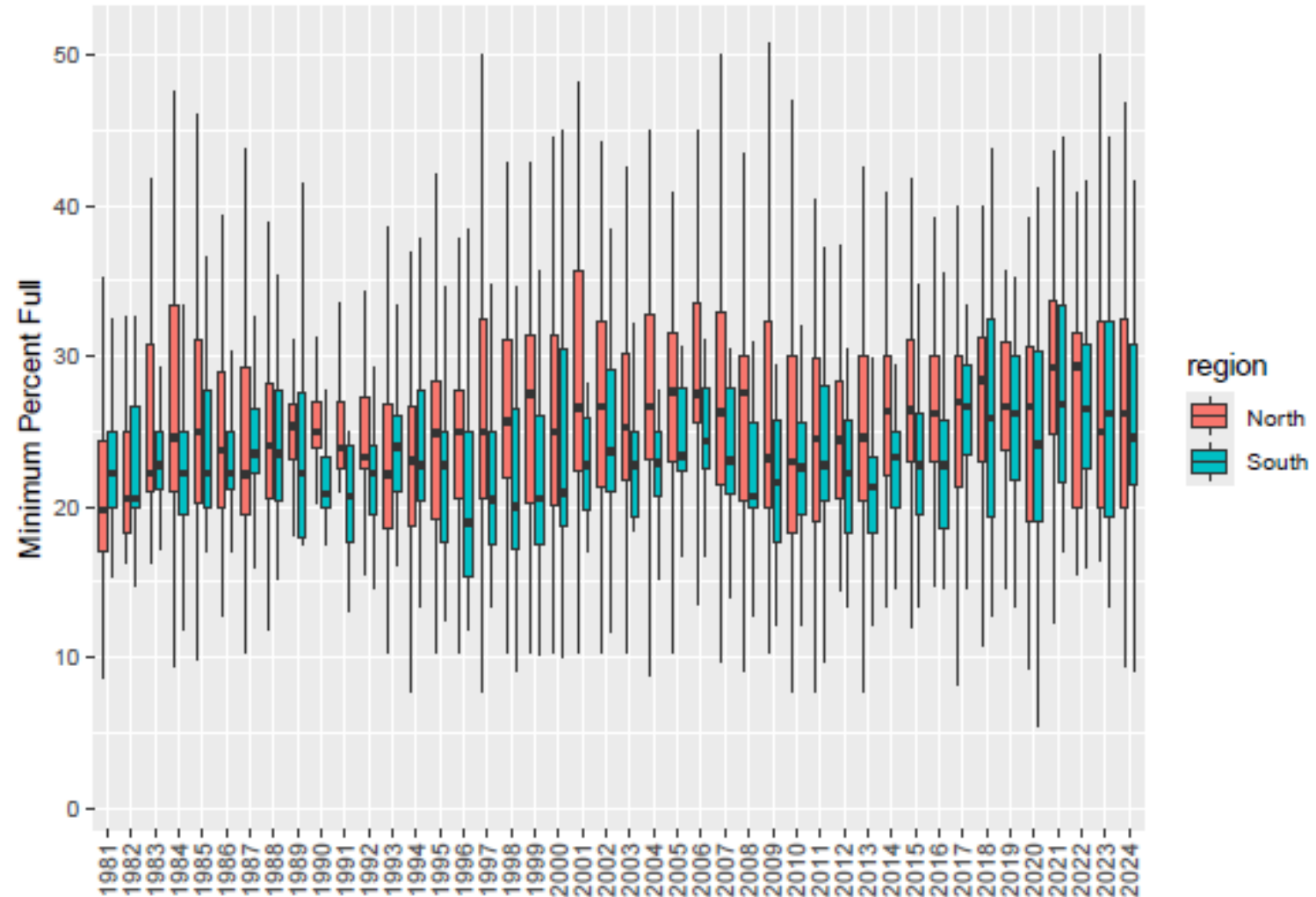


Figure 20: Comparison of minimum anglers relative to capacity for trips in the Southeast US Atlantic by region (outliers not plotted).

Top Five Species by Month:

Which species would be impacted by changes in management by month?

- **Northern:**
 - Vermilion Snapper ranked highest in all months
 - Black Sea Bass, White Grunt, Gray Triggerfish, Tomtate important throughout the year
- **Southern:**
 - White Grunt and Yellowtail important in all months
 - Lane Snapper, Gray Snapper, White Grunt important throughout the year

Table 2: Top five species from 2020 to 2025 by month for the northern region in order of number of fish landed.

Month	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Jan	VERMILION SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	BLACK SEA BASS	GRAY SNAPPER	TOMTATE
Feb	VERMILION SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	BLACK SEA BASS	GRAY SNAPPER	TOMTATE
Mar	VERMILION SNAPPER	BLACK SEA BASS	LANE SNAPPER	SPOTTAIL PINFISH	TOMTATE
Apr	VERMILION SNAPPER	BLACK SEA BASS	SPOTTAIL PINFISH	GRAY TRIGGERFISH	TOMTATE
May	VERMILION SNAPPER	WHITE GRUNT	BLACK SEA BASS	GRAY TRIGGERFISH	SPOTTAIL PINFISH
Jun	VERMILION SNAPPER	SPOTTAIL PINFISH	WHITE GRUNT	BLACK SEA BASS	GRAY TRIGGERFISH
Jul	VERMILION SNAPPER	SPOTTAIL PINFISH	TOMTATE	WHITE GRUNT	BLACK SEA BASS
Aug	VERMILION SNAPPER	SPOTTAIL PINFISH	TOMTATE	WHITE GRUNT	GRAY TRIGGERFISH
Sep	VERMILION SNAPPER	TOMTATE	SPOTTAIL PINFISH	WHITE GRUNT	GRAY TRIGGERFISH
Oct	VERMILION SNAPPER	GRAY TRIGGERFISH	SPOTTAIL PINFISH	TOMTATE	WHITE GRUNT
Nov	VERMILION SNAPPER	SCUP	GRAY TRIGGERFISH	BLACK SEA BASS	SPOTTAIL PINFISH
Dec	VERMILION SNAPPER	BLACK SEA BASS	LANE SNAPPER	TOMTATE	GRAY SNAPPER

Table 3: Top five species from 2020 to 2025 by month for the southern region in order of number of fish landed.

Month	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Jan	WHITE GRUNT	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	LITTLEHEAD PORGY	GRAY SNAPPER
Feb	WHITE GRUNT	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	LITTLEHEAD PORGY	TOMTATE
Mar	WHITE GRUNT	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	LITTLEHEAD PORGY	TOMTATE
Apr	WHITE GRUNT	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	TOMTATE	LITTLEHEAD PORGY
May	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	WHITE GRUNT	LANE SNAPPER	TOMTATE	GRAY SNAPPER
Jun	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	WHITE GRUNT	GRAY SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	TOMTATE
Jul	GRAY SNAPPER	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	WHITE GRUNT	TOMTATE	LANE SNAPPER
Aug	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	GRAY SNAPPER	WHITE GRUNT	LANE SNAPPER	TOMTATE
Sep	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	WHITE GRUNT	GRAY SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	VERMILION SNAPPER
Oct	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	WHITE GRUNT	LANE SNAPPER	GRAY SNAPPER	BLUE RUNNER
Nov	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	WHITE GRUNT	LANE SNAPPER	GRAY SNAPPER	BLUE RUNNER
Dec	WHITE GRUNT	YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER	LANE SNAPPER	GRAY SNAPPER	LITTLEHEAD PORGY

Trips by Depth

If most trips are occurring in deep waters what could be the potential impact of discards?

- Depth fished increases with length of trip
- Southern Area
 - Half day trips moved to shallower waters
 - Multi-day trips moved to deeper waters

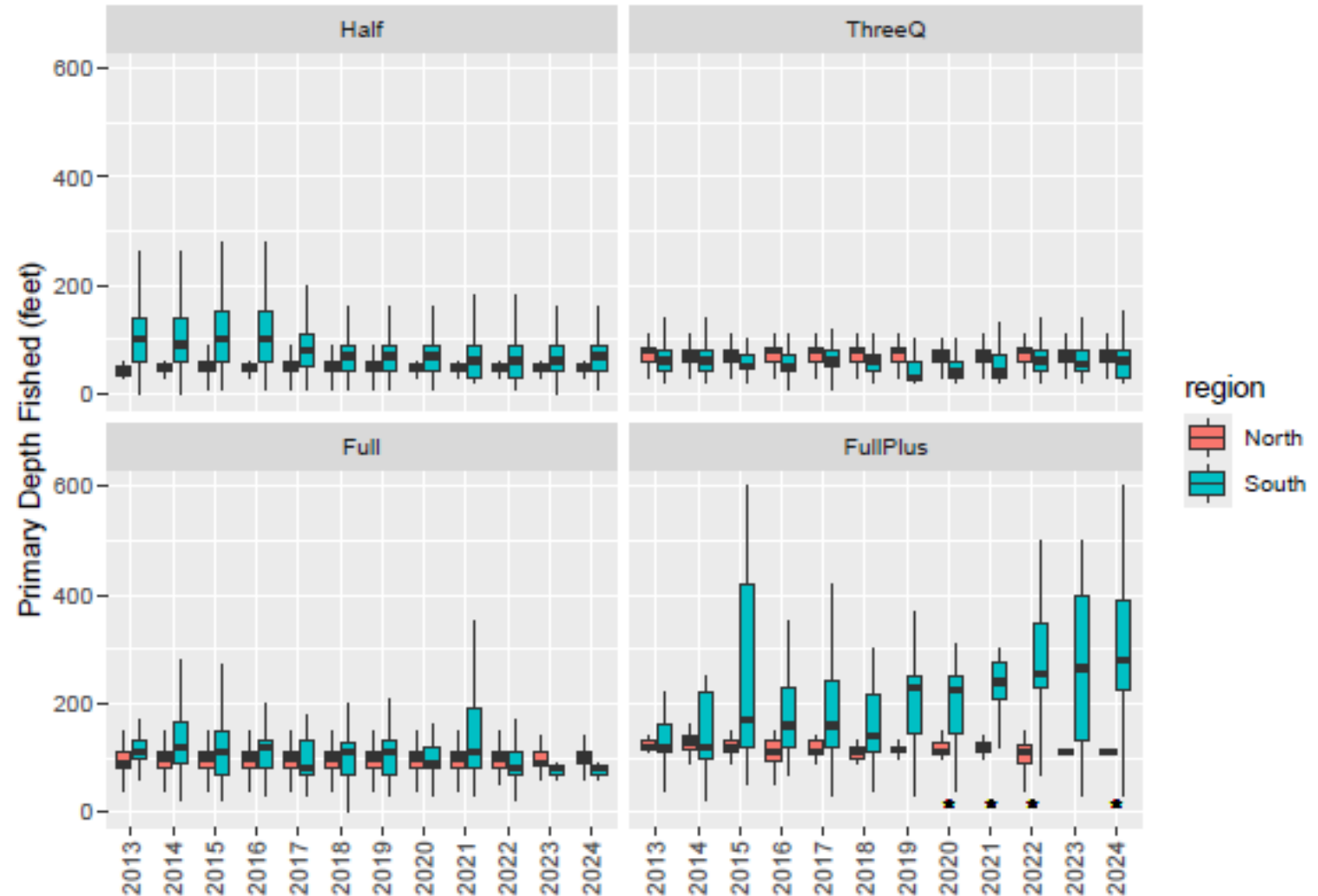


Figure 29: Comparison of primary depth fished in the Southeast US Atlantic by region and trip type (outliers not plotted).

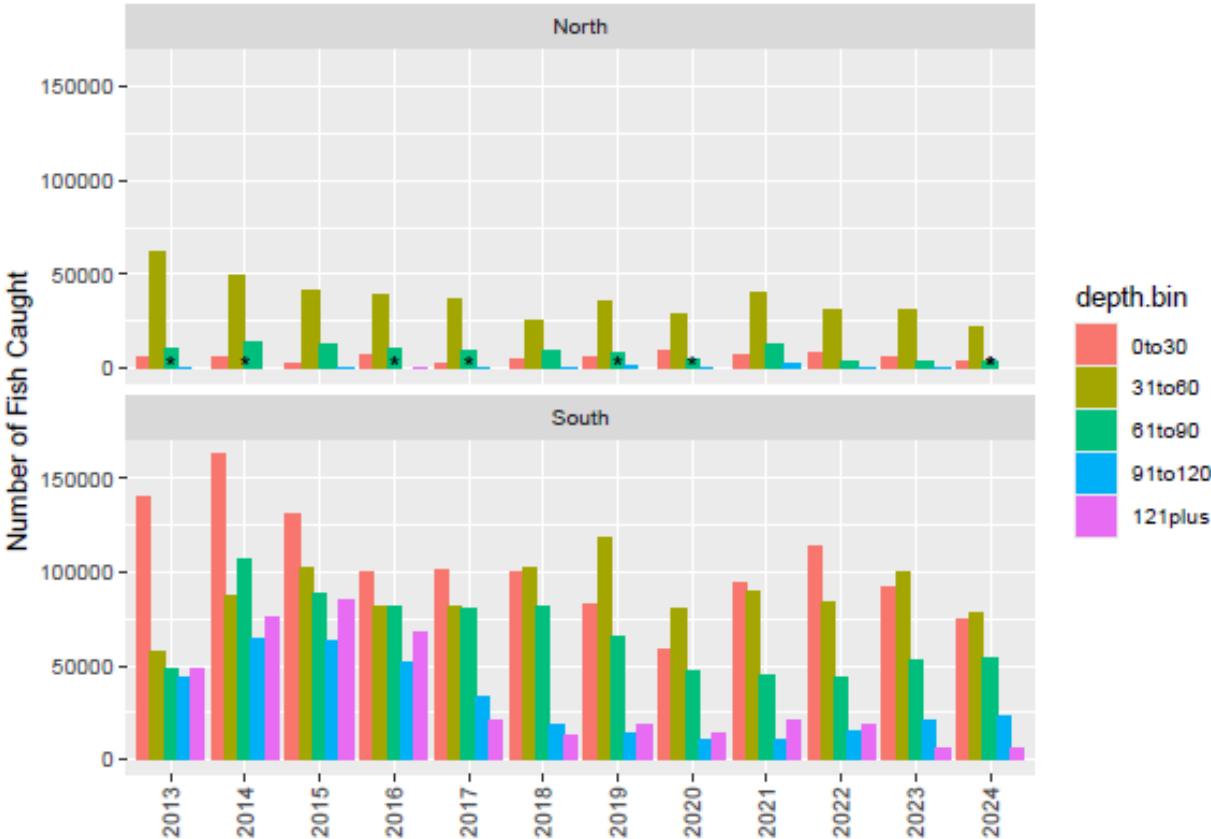


Figure 30: Comparison of the total catch in the Southeast US Atlantic by year and region for half-day trips. Year and depth bin combinations where data are confidential are denoted with an asterisk.

- In the southern region on half day trips, most fish were caught in less than 60 feet since 2017

- In the northern region on full day trips, most fish were caught between 91 and 120 feet.

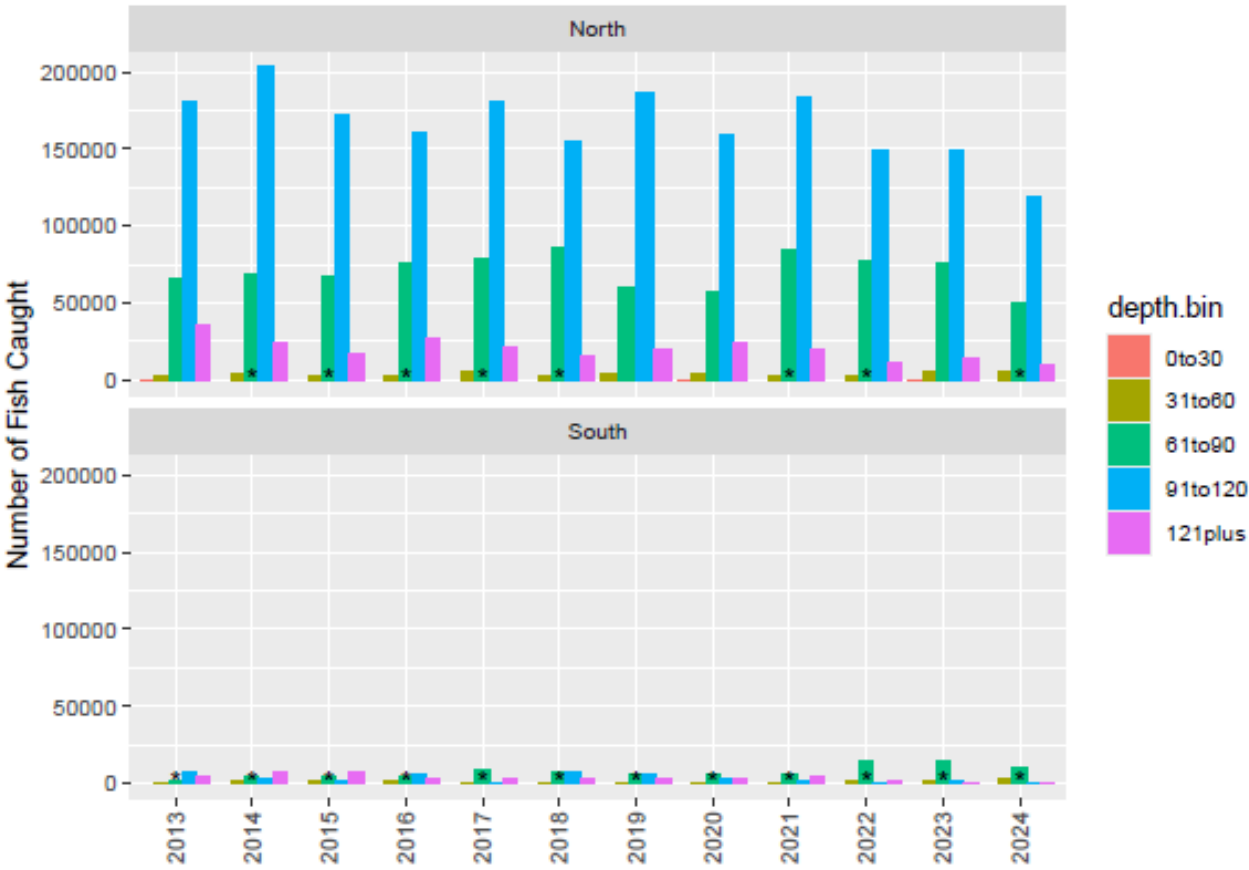


Figure 32: Comparison of the total catch in the Southeast US Atlantic by year and region for full-day trips. Year and depth bin combinations where data are confidential are denoted with an asterisk.

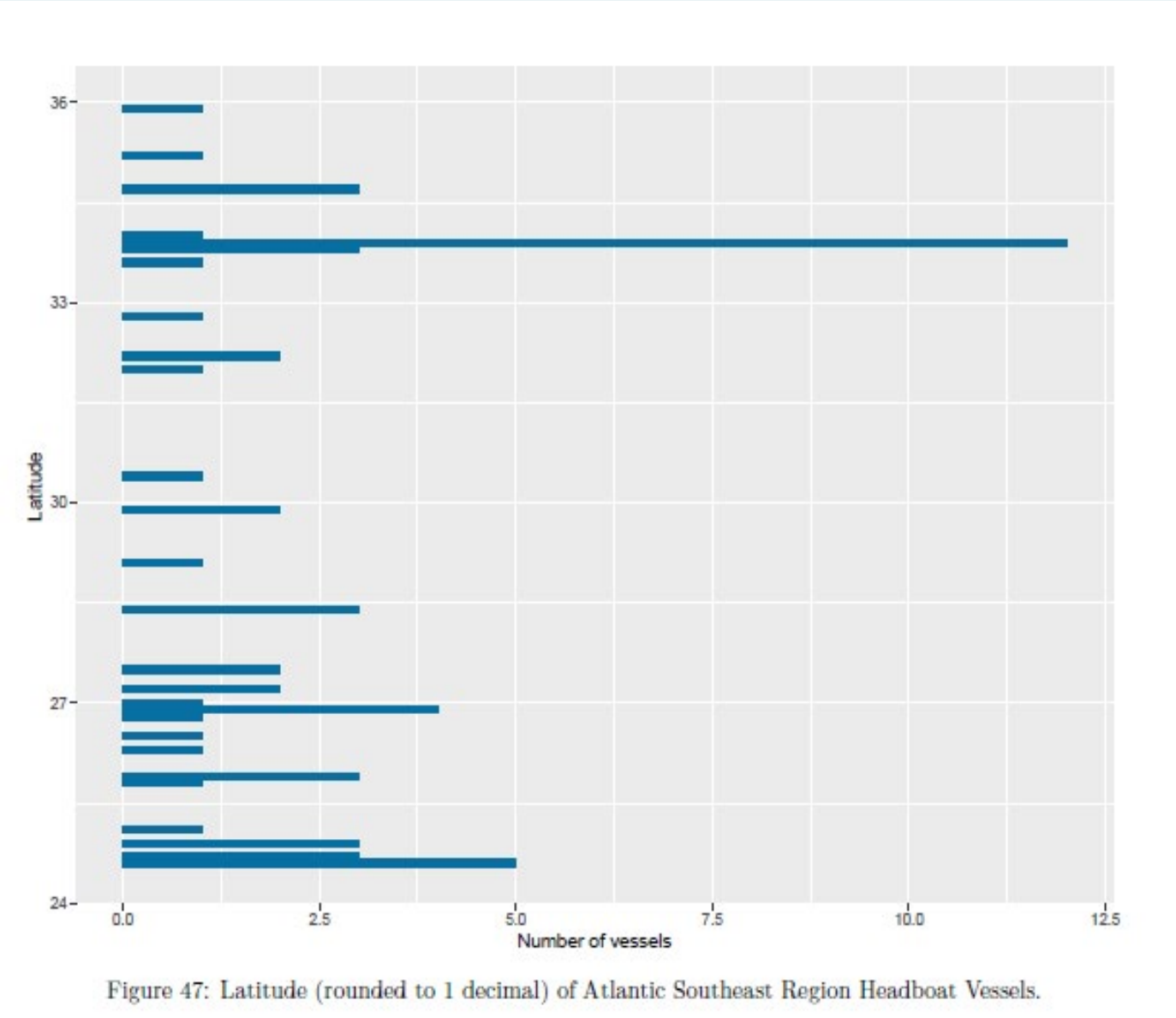
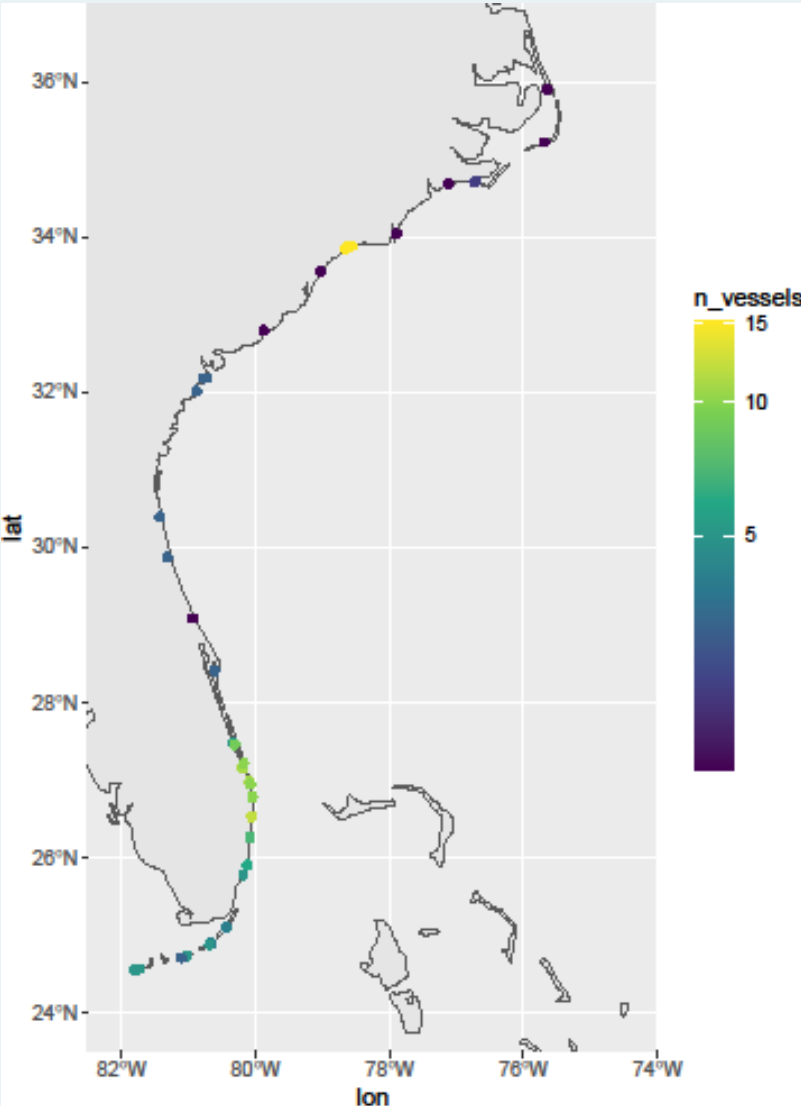


Figure 47: Latitude (rounded to 1 decimal) of Atlantic Southeast Region Headboat Vessels.



Questions?

Thank you to Rob Cheshire and SRHS Staff for
providing information