

Amendment 46 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Private Recreational Permitting and Education Requirement) Decision Document June 2025

Note: Words that are [underlined and in blue font](#) provide a link to other documents.

Background

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has been developing Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP), with the most recent review at the [March 2025 meeting](#). The Council directed staff to revise the Purpose statement, further revised actions, and prepare the amendment for approval for public hearings.

Several of the Council's AP's have provided feedback on action in this amendment over multiple meetings. The full summary reports and recommendations that the Council has previously received on Amendment 46 can be found under the following links:

- Joint Council Workgroup on Section 102 of the Modern Fish Act (click [HERE](#))
- Private Recreational Reporting Working Group recommendations (click [HERE](#))
- Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting Advisory Panel ([Meeting 1](#), [Meeting 2](#), [Meeting 3](#), [Meeting 4](#), and [Meeting 5](#))
- Snapper Grouper Private Angler AP ([Meeting 1](#) and [Meeting 2](#))
- Snapper Grouper AP ([Meeting 1](#) and [Meeting 2](#))
- Outreach and Communications AP (click [Meeting 1](#) and [Meeting 2](#))
- Law Enforcement AP (click [HERE](#))

Actions in this amendment

1. Establish a private recreational permit in the snapper grouper fishery
2. Specify the species that would be covered by the permit
3. Establish an education requirement

4. Specify the timing of when the required education component needs to be completed
5. Establish an exemption to the federal permit and education requirement based on permitting by the states

Objectives for this meeting

- Review March 2025 Council guidance and IPT feedback.
- Provide feedback on edits to Actions 1 and 2.
- Confirm or select preferred alternatives.
- Consider approval for public hearings.

Tentative amendment timing

✓December 2022	Council reviewed options paper and approved amendment for scoping.
✓Winter 2023	Conducted scoping.
✓March 2023	Council reviewed scoping comments and provided guidance on the amendment.
✓June 2023	Council reviewed amendment and Technical AP and Snapper Grouper AP comments.
✓September 2023	Council reviewed amendment and Technical AP comments.
✓December 2023	Council reviewed Snapper Grouper and Outreach and Communications AP comments, draft effects, and made modifications to the amendment.
✓March 2024	Council reviewed of amendment and Law Enforcement AP comments.
✓Spring 2024	Review by Private Angler AP and Permitting and Reporting AP.
✓June 2024	Council reviewed AP comments.
✓December 2024	Council reviewed amendment and AP comments.
✓March 2025	Council reviewed amendment.
June 2025	Council reviews modifications to the amendment, selects preferred alternatives, and approves for public hearings.
Summer 2025	Conduct public hearings.
September 2025	Council reviews amendment and public hearing comments.
December 2025	Council reviews final draft of amendment and considers approval for formal review.
2026/2027 (TBD)	Regulation changes effective.

Purpose and Need statements

The **purpose** of the amendment is to develop a federal recreational permitting system that will identify the universe of private anglers or vessels targeting South Atlantic snapper grouper species and will enhance the ability to collect recreational effort and catch data through potential modifications in survey frame and precision of effort estimation. Also work to promote best recreational fishing practices through education.

The **need** for the amendment is to improve the quality of effort and catch data for the private component of the recreational sector that targets South Atlantic snapper grouper species, while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects. Also improve education on best fishing practices.

Committee Action:

- NO ACTION REQUIRED. NOTE IF ANY CHANGES ARE NEEDED.

Actions in the Amendment

CURRENT Action 1. Establish a federal private recreational permit requirement in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Purpose of the Action: *This action is necessary to establish a federal private recreational permit requirement in the snapper grouper fishery and determine whether the permit will be issued to a vessel or an angler.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not establish a federal private recreational permit requirement for vessels or anglers in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

Alternative 2. Require a federal permit for all private vessels to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

Preferred Alternative 3. Require a federal permit for all private anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

IPT SUGGESTED Action 1. Establish a federal private recreational permit requirement for species in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not establish a federal private recreational permit requirement for vessels or anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess species in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

Alternative 2. Require a federal permit for all private vessels to fish for, harvest, or possess species in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. Specify the species for which a federal private recreational permit would be required:

Sub-Alternative 2a. Any species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Sub-Alternative 2b. Any species covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey.

Sub-Alternative 2c. Any deepwater species.

Preferred Alternative 3. Require a federal permit for all private anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess species in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. Specify the species for which a federal private recreational permit would be required:

Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a. Any species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Sub-Alternative 3b. Any species covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey.

Sub-Alternative 3c. Any deepwater species.

Council guidance from March 2025:

- A Committee member requested information on the tradeoff in costs and burden to the agency based on permit type.

Effects Summary:

Biological

- **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** would be expected to have positive impacts for snapper grouper species.
 - Improved estimates of recreational fishing effort are expected to reduce uncertainty in recreational catch estimates which should result in higher precision for outputs from stock assessments and improved catch monitoring.
- Biological benefits, if realized, would be similar under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3**, followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Economic

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would forgo potential improvements in catch and effort information for the private component of the recreational sector.
- **Alternative 2** or **Preferred Alternative 3** would increase costs to private recreational participants both through the permit application fee (likely around \$25) as well as the opportunity cost of the time that it would take to complete and submit a permit application.
 - Notably lower total costs for **Alternative 2** compared to **Preferred Alternative 3**.
- Indirect benefits from potential improvements in catch and effort estimates. Benefits would be similar between **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3**.

Social

- No qualifying criteria proposed to obtain this federal permit so direct social effects of **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** should be minimal and primarily limited to the increased burden of paperwork when applying for and renewing a permit.
- The permit requirement may be viewed by anglers as creating some redundancy, which may cause additional burden and frustration for individuals who would need to apply for multiple permits.
 - The highest effects are anticipated to be seen in Florida, which accounts the greatest proportion of private recreational snapper grouper landings (85.1%), followed by North Carolina (6.9%), South Carolina (5.4%), and Georgia (2.6%).
- There may be indirect social effects depending on how snapper grouper fishermen perceive a federal recreational permit with regard to fairness and equity.

Administrative

- **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** would result in adverse administrative effects for fishery constituents, NMFS, and law enforcement.
 - Due to the higher number of potential recreational anglers that could apply for a permit compared to the number of private recreational fishing vessels, adverse administrative effects would be greatest under **Preferred Alternative 3**.

AP Comments and Recommendations:

Snapper Grouper AP (October 2023):

- MOTION: Regardless of vessel or angler based permitting, the AP advises the Council to include reporting, permitting, and education.

Permitting and Reporting AP (April 2024):

- RECOMMENDATION: The AP continues to recommend that a **vessel-based permit** would be superior to an angler-based permit from a technical perspective, logistical perspective, and for survey design. The net benefits to any subsequent improvements in private recreational catch and effort estimates from a vessel-based permit are likely going to be greater than those resulting from an angler-based permit.

Private Angler AP (May 2024):

- A **vessel-based permit** would be a better option than an angler-based permit.
 - If there is an angler-based permit, it may deter some people from participating.
 - A vessel-based permit would be easier to keep track of and enforce on the water or at the boat ramp.

Law Enforcement AP (January 2024):

- Generally, a **vessel-based permit** would be easier to enforce; however, there could be enforcement issues with vessel rental and delivery operations or if the vessel owner is not onboard.

IPT Comments/recommendations:

- Since implementing a permit in the Snapper Grouper fishery must be linked with species in the FMP, the IPT felt that it would be appropriate to consider combining Actions 1 and 2.
 - The alternatives specify the type of permit that would be created (vessel or angler), while the sub-alternatives specify which species would be covered under the permit.
 - Combining Actions 1 and 2 would streamline the amendment.
 - Decisions made here would affect Action 2 and the sub-alternatives of Action 5.
- From an administrative perspective, requiring a vessel-based permit would be considerably less costly than an angler-based permit.
 - Existing permitting structure is geared towards vessel-based permitting and could potentially be modified to accommodate a private recreational permit.
 - The overall logistical challenges are greater for an angler-based permit. An angler-based permit would require a different permitting and database structure. Would likely need to build a new permitting system.
 - Additional angler-based permitting staff and processing time, so potentially fewer quality assurance checks.
 - One-time development and re-occurring operational costs would be greater under an angler-based permit.
 - The exact amount is difficult to estimate but total costs will be a notably large amount. Costs will also potentially be an order of magnitude higher for an angler-based permit compared to a vessel-based permit.

Committee Action:

- DISCUSS WHETHER TO ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTION TO COMBINE CURRENT ACTIONS 1 AND 2.
- CONFIRM THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

Action 2. Specify the species for which a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required

Purpose of the Action: *This action would specify the species that would be covered by a federal private recreational permit requirement in the snapper grouper fishery.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not require private vessels or private anglers to have a valid federal permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

Preferred Alternative 2. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Alternative 3. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any species covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey.

Alternative 4. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any deepwater species.

Discussion:

- The Committee has the option to select multiple alternatives as preferred to capture different groups of species.
- **Alternatives 2 (Preferred) through 4** address the species would be covered by the permit (Table 1).
 - **Preferred Alternative 2** would cover 55 species.
 - **Alternative 3** would cover 13 species.
 - **Alternative 4** would cover 10 species.
- The Council is considering removing species from the Snapper Grouper fishery management unit (FMU). This would affect how many species are covered under **Preferred Alternative 2**.
 - The Committee may also want to discuss whether to include ecosystem component (EC) species under the permit.

Table 1. Species in the snapper grouper FMU.

Species	FL SRFS	DW Species	Species	FL SRFS	DW Species
Black grouper	X		Cottonwick+		
Gag	X		Cubera snapper		
Greater amberjack	X		Goliath grouper		
Hogfish	X		Gray snapper		
Mutton snapper	X		Graysby		
Red grouper	X		Jolthead porgy		
Red snapper	X		Knobbed porgy		

Vermilion snapper	X		Lane snapper		
Yellowtail snapper	X		Longspine porgy+		
Banded rudderfish	X		Margate		
Lesser amberjack	X		Nassau grouper		
Gray triggerfish	X		Ocean triggerfish+		
Almaco jack	X		Red hind		
Yellowedge grouper		X	Red porgy		
Silk snapper		X	Rock hind		
Misty grouper		X	Rock sea bass+		
Sand tilefish		X	Sailor's choice		
Queen snapper		X	Saucereye porgy		
Blackfin snapper		X	Scamp		
Blueline tilefish		X	Scup		
Golden tilefish		X	Speckled hind		
Snowy grouper		X	Tomtate		
Wreckfish		X	Warsaw grouper		
Atlantic spadefish			White grunt		
Bank sea bass+			Whitebone porgy		
Bar Jack			Yellowfin grouper		
Black sea bass			Yellowmouth grouper		
Coney					

FL SRFS = species is covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey.

DW Species = species is part of the deepwater complex or a species typically found in deepwater.

+ = Ecosystem component species.

Effects Summary:

Biological

- **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4** would be expected to have positive impacts for snapper grouper species.
- Including the largest number of potential species under a permit could result in improved data collection, especially for rare event species.
- Biological benefits, if realized, would be greatest under **Preferred Alternative 2**, followed by **Alternative 3, Alternative 4, and Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Economic

- The number of species covered by a permit would affect how many fishery participants need to be permitted, with the more species covered, the more permits that would likely need to be issued.
 - Costs would be similar to those described in Action 1.
 - There would be potential improvements in catch and effort information leading to indirect benefits. **Preferred Alternative 2** is inclusive of the most species, thus has the highest potential utility and potential for indirect economic benefits.

- In terms of total economic costs for permit holders, **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in the highest overall costs followed by **Alternative 3**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Social

- **Preferred Alternative 2** would be the least complex for private recreational anglers and law enforcement.
- **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** would add complexity which may make it challenging for fishermen and law enforcement to know what is required on a given fishing trip, potentially decreasing compliance with regulations.
 - Alternatively, fishermen that do not target species covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey (**Alternative 3**) or deep-water species (**Alternative 4**) would not need a permit, reducing the overall burden on the recreational sector.

Administrative

- **Preferred Alternative 2**, and **Alternatives 3** and **4** would result in higher administrative burden for enforcement officers.
 - Including the whole snapper grouper complex (**Preferred Alternative 2**) would ease enforcement inspections.

AP Comments and Recommendations:

Snapper Grouper AP (April & October 2023):

- MOTION: Recommend that the Council select **Alternative 2** (all species within the snapper grouper complex).

Permitting and Reporting AP (April 2024 and August 2023):

- RECOMMENDATION: The AP recommends **Alternative 2** in Action 2. There is little to no downside of being more inclusive of species but there is a cost if more species need to be added. Suggest initially capturing all species that may be needed currently and in the future.

Law Enforcement AP (January 2024):

- RECOMMENDATION: The permit should cover **all snapper grouper species** to make it more enforceable and improve compliance with the federal permit.

Private Angler AP (May 2024):

- It is an unnecessary burden on fishermen to have to identify a subset of species that are covered under the permit. Also, if reporting eventually follows, it would be preferable to have the permit **cover all species** to facilitate reporting down the road.
- Alternatively, including all snapper grouper species is a big ask.

IPT Comments:

- In review of the amendment the IPT discussed the inclusion of ecosystem component (EC) species under **Preferred Alternative 2**.
 - By definition, EC species are not in need of conservation and management.
 - However, the permit is open access, so it is not restricting harvest of the stocks.

- The permit is largely about improved data collection, which is specifically mentioned in 600.305(c)(5) as something viable for EC species.
- It is unlikely that someone is going to go fishing in the EEZ for only EC species. The data to be collected through the permit requirement would relate to the number of participants fishing for snapper grouper stocks in the EEZ and trips landing EC species are likely already covered by the permit requirement for the managed species.

Committee Action:

- DOES THE COMMITTEE WANT TO MAINTAIN ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES IN **PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE 2**?
 - MAINTAIN EC SPECIES IN THE ALTERNATIVE (STATUS QUO)?
 - REMOVE EC SPECIES FROM THE ALTERNATIVE?
 - CREATE A NEW ALTERNATIVE THAT EXCLUDES EC SPECIES?
- CONFIRM PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

Action 3. Establish an education component in conjunction with a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit

***Purpose of the Action:** This action is necessary to establish an education requirement for private recreational permit holders fishing for, harvesting, or possessing snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region. The action also clarifies whether the implementation of the required education component would be delayed from the implementation of the private recreational permit.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not require an education component for private recreational permit holders to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

Alternative 2. Establish and require an education component in conjunction with a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. The education component would be **required for initial issuance** of a federal private recreational permit.

Alternative 3. Establish and require an education component in conjunction with a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. The education component would be **implemented after** the federal private recreational permit requirement has been established.

Completion of the education component would be required:

Sub-alternative 3a. Before initial reissuance of the permit.

Sub-alternative 3b. When permit holders are required to complete the education requirement by the issuing authority.

Effects Summary:

Biological

- If the required training is utilized by recreational anglers, **Alternatives 2 and 3** could result in reduced mortality of discarded snapper grouper and co-occurring species.

Economic

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would forgo potential improvements in post release mortality of some snapper grouper species, which could also lead to forgone economic benefits.
- **Alternative 2 and Alternative 3** would result in direct economic effects through increased costs to private recreational participants and administrative costs to the agency.
 - The opportunity cost of the time to complete the requirement.
 - Costs associated with developing and maintaining the education materials and program.
- Potential improvements in post release mortality of some species under both **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would lead to potential indirect economic benefits.

Social

- The short-term direct negative social effects of **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would be associated with the time burden of completing the program.

- If the education component is virtual, some fishermen that are not familiar with computers may not be comfortable completing the education component.
- If the education component promotes best fishing practices, it would improve the long-term sustainability of the snapper grouper resource which would improve fishing opportunities for all participants in the snapper grouper fishery.

Administrative

- **Alternatives 2 and 3** would create substantial adverse administrative effects.
 - Several forms of educational and outreach materials would need to be developed and made available to fishery participants.
 - NMFS would need to develop a process to verify completion of the required training and apply it to the application (e.g., intersystem connections).
 - There would be long-term impacts on the agency from maintaining outreach material and the online training portal.

AP Comments and Recommendations:

Permitting and Reporting AP (August 2022, May 2023, and April 2024):

- An education requirement would not be an adequate substitute for a permit but would pair well with a permit, potentially in the **initial issuance** or renewal process.

Snapper Grouper AP (October 2023):

- **RECOMMENDATION:** The AP reiterated support for establishing an education requirement **as soon as possible**.

Outreach and Communications AP (May 2024):

- **RECOMMENDATION:** The AP reiterated that the education component should be required **before issuing the permit** and should be available online.

Law Enforcement AP (January 2024):

- **RECOMMENDATION:** The education requirement should apply **when the permit is issued** rather than a delayed implementation.

Private Angler AP (November 2024):

- Most AP members felt that an education requirement needs to be required **before initial issuance** of a permit (Action 3, **Alternative 2**).

IPT Comments:

- An education program is going to be a substantial cost to the agency, both in development and on-going administration of the program.
 - Notable monetary cost and staffing requirements.
- If the Committee does not want to further pursue a delayed implementation in **Alternative 3**, Actions 3 and 4 could be combined to streamline the amendment.

Committee Action:

- **CONSIDER MODIFICATIONS AND SELECT A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.**

Action 4. Specify the timing of the education component requirement for the private recreational snapper grouper permit

***Purpose of the Action:** This action is necessary to establish how often an education component would need to be completed.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). There is not a required education component for private recreational anglers or vessels to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

Alternative 2. Completion of the education component would be required **upon each issuance** of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit.

Alternative 3. Completion of the education component would be required **every other year** upon issuance of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit.

Alternative 4. Completion of the education component would be required only **upon initial issuance** of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit.

Alternative 5. Completion of the education component would be required **upon initial issuance** of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and **each time that the education component materials are updated**.

Effects Summary:

Biological

- Effects on the biological environment would likely be minimal; however, regular completion of the education component could contribute to the long-term sustainability of the snapper grouper fishery and thus result in positive biological effects.

Economic

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not result in direct economic effects but would forgo potential improvements in post release mortality of some species, which could also lead to forgone indirect economic benefits.
- Costs are similar to those described for Action 3.
 - **Alternative 2** would require more frequent training and thus incur the most costs than other alternatives considered since the education requirement would need to be satisfied annually.
 - Costs would decrease with decreasing frequency.

Social

- Similar to the effects of Action 3. The more frequent the requirement to complete an education component the greater the social effects on private recreational fishermen.
- More frequent completion of the education component ensures that private recreational fishermen maintain proficiency at best fishing practices and are up to date on new research and management related to the snapper grouper fishery.

Administrative

- Agency costs would be higher the more often the requirement must be satisfied. Therefore, **Alternative 2** is likely to create the most adverse administrative effects, followed by **Alternative 3, Alternative 5, Alternative 4, and Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

AP Comments and Recommendations:

Snapper Grouper AP (April 2023):

- RECOMMENDATION: Consider implementing an **education requirement that is valid for as long as a permit is maintained** and up to date. If a permit lapses or a new permit is issued, the permit holder would need to go through the education requirement again.

Law Enforcement AP (January 2024):

- Making permit holders **aware of new regulations each year** would help with compliance.

Outreach and Communications AP (May 2024):

- RECOMMENDATION: An online course should be developed (suggestions included 3-5 minutes, 7-10 minutes, up to 15 minutes) **for the initial permit and a shorter online course for annual permit renewal**.

Private Angler AP (November 2024):

- Some AP members felt that an initial education course with a refresher if education materials are updated was appropriate (**Alternative 5**).
- Other AP members noted that communicating the need for all permit holders to re-complete an education requirement at an unspecified date (**Alternative 5**) is going to be a challenge and that a known, regular interval would be better.
 - Unless there is a way to effectively communicate when the education component is updated, then the requirement should be one-time only or once a year (**Alternative 2** or **Alternative 4**).

IPT Comments:

- The Council will need to specify additional details of how to develop an education component such as who will be developing the materials? What will be the format (online? video? test?, etc.)?
 - Does the Council intend to be responsible for developing and maintaining the education materials?
 - An education component would trigger the Paperwork Reduction (PRA) approval process. Will need to know how long the training will take and what format to start the PRA process.
- For **Alternative 5**, what would be an update significant enough to trigger everyone re-taking the education module?

Committee Action:

- SELECT A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

Action 5. Establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements based on permitting and education by the states

***Purpose of the Action:** This action would establish a mechanism that would exempt a state from the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements provided that similar measures were enacted for state-based permit and education requirements.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.

Alternative 2. Establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements. The National Marine Fisheries Service would certify a state permit and education component as equivalent to a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education component provided the state implements equivalent measures that at a minimum include the following:

Sub-alternative 2a. The state permit is required for the preferred entity specified in Action 1.

Sub-alternative 2b. The state permit is required for the preferred species identified in Action 2.

Sub-alternative 2c. The state permit would have the preferred education requirements identified in Action 3 and Action 4.

Sub-alternative 2d. The state permit would remain valid for the same period of time as the federal permit.

Council guidance from March 2025:

- Concern among Committee members about the way the action and alternatives are written in that there is not enough flexibility for states. The action should not be prescriptive and dictate what a state can and cannot do.
- Continue to consider a way to “grandfather in” or exempt a state that already has an existing program, such as Florida.
- Develop a sub-alternative that would exempt a state based on accepting a proposal from that state (similar to how the national saltwater angler registry works or the ASMFC conservation equivalency).
- State directors discuss with NMFS the specifics of how states could be exempt.
- The Committee included several questions addressed in the IPT comments below.

Effects Summary:

Biological

- Not likely to impact the biological environment because the mechanism for implementation is administrative in nature.

Economic

- Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, there would be forgone cost savings from eliminating redundant permitting and education requirements.
 - Where applicable, **Alternative 2** would eliminate the need to obtain a federal and state permit, thus decreasing costs for these participants.

Social

- The more permits required for fishermen to enter a given fishery, the more time fishermen must give up to complete forms and required trainings.
 - Additionally, multiple permits for the same activity may cause confusion among fishermen and law enforcement, lowering compliance and complicating enforcement efforts.
- Under **Alternative 2** there would be no redundancy in requirements between a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and a similar state permit. Requiring a set of minimum criteria for a state program (**Sub-alternatives 2a through 2d**) ensures that the social benefits of a private recreational permit would still be achieved.

Administrative

- **Alternative 2** and its respective sub-alternatives would create adverse administrative effects since they would require extensive additional coordination between the NMFS and state database systems.

IPT Comments:

- When selecting sub-alternatives, the Council should discuss whether the state-administered program would provide equivalent information as the federal program. If so, then some sub-alternatives could potentially not be selected as preferred.
 - Council rationale will be very important for this action and how it is discussed in the amendment document.
- States would need to supply the same information as the federal program. It needs to be specified how information will be shared with the agency and at what time intervals.
- The specifications for exemption of a state program need to be objective. Otherwise could run afoul of National Standard 4 (NS 4) - *“Conservation and management measures shall not discriminate between residents of different states”*
 - In response to the request for a new sub-alternative, the IPT felt that this was being addressed in the sub-alternatives of **Alternative 2**. If this was mis-understood, further clarification is requested of the Committee on the IPT’s task.
- It is going to take a notable amount of effort and funding for the federal government to develop a permit and education program. There is concern if a permit and education program are developed and the states subsequently implement programs of their own, effort and money spent on a federal permit will be wasted.
- The following attempts to address the questions that were included in the March 2025 Committee report:
 - 1) *Could a state be exempt from the permit requirement based on how prevalent a species or group of species is for that state?*
 - It is technically possible but varying species by state will decrease the utility of the permit and ability to use the data for management across the region.

- Decreasing utility of the permit would also be contrary to the purpose and need.
- 2) *The Florida program is certified by MRIP. Could flexibility be built-in for states if certified by MRIP?*
 - MRIP does not certify permitting or education programs. MRIP has certified the FL state reef fish program sampling methodology and subsequent catch and effort estimates. A reef fish endorsement is part of this, but not specifically what MRIP certified.
 - MRIP policy for certification does not mean that the information from the program is necessarily BSIA. Other existing information may be deemed more appropriate for use in management.
 - 3) *Could the number of species be based initially on those covered by the FL SRFS, work up coast to see what species would be most relevant, and narrow down the list of core species from there?*
 - Yes, but this should be a Council discussion and decision before the permit requirement goes in place. It should be discussed in the amendment as well.
 - Could the list be narrowed down or is the intent for it to be expanded? What is the rationale for changing the list in the future?
 - If the specifics are not addressed in this amendment, it will require a new management action.
 - 4) *Could a time component be built in? For example, a state could be exempt for a certain amount of time while species are being changed?*
 - Yes, but this would involve a delay in implementation of the permit and education requirement. This delay should be specified by the Council for discussion in the amendment and for notice to the public.
 - Also, the exemption needs to be objective in which state gets delayed implementation and not differentiate specifically between states. Otherwise, it may contradict NS 4.
 - 5) *Could another broader sub-alternative be considered along the lines of “species proposed by the state contingent upon review and approval by the Council”?*
 - This seems similar to what is accomplished through **Alternative 2, Sub-alternative 2b**.
 - NMFS could consult with the Council when exempting a state program, but the process would get more complex.
 - The Council should clarify if their intent is to be part of the approval process. As the action is currently written, NMFS would oversee certifying and exempting a state permit and education program.

Committee Action:

- SELECT A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

Committee Action:

- APPROVE AMENDMENT 46 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.