

# **Summary Report**

## **Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting**

### **April 2-3, 2025**

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) convened in Charleston, SC on April 2-3, 2025.

The AP approved the minutes from the October 2025 meeting and the agenda for the April 2025 meeting.

#### **1. Committee Chair Remarks**

Jessica McCawley, Chair of the Snapper Grouper Committee for the Council, provided opening remarks, along with a framework for what the Council was expecting from the AP at the meeting.

#### **2. Florida Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permit Discard Research Projects Update**

Jessica McCawley (Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission) updated the AP on the research projects being conducted in Florida to investigate red snapper recreational catches, releases, and management strategies.

#### **3. Council Discussion Updates**

Council staff updated the AP on the status of recent and developing Council actions that were not scheduled for discussion in this AP meeting, including Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Amendments 48 (Wreckfish Individual Transfer Quota Program Modernization), 55 (Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper), and 46 (Private Recreational Permit); the Joint Commercial Logbook Amendment; the Comprehensive Recreational For-Hire Limited Entry Amendment; and Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 36 (Gag and Black Grouper Recreational Vessel Limits and On-Demand Black Sea Bass Pot Stowage).

Staff also updated the AP on recent and ongoing discussions concerning evaluation of the need for continued management for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU). The Council has selected species within the FMU that will be fully evaluated and discussed further at future Council and AP meetings.

#### **4. Citizen Science Update**

Council staff shared information on Citizen Science Program activities, providing updates on the Citizen Science Project Idea Portal, SMILE, FISHstory, and SAFMC Release projects. Highlights included an overview of the [SAFMC Release 2024 data summary](#) and a new collaboration between Sea Grant and SAFMC Release – the [Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo](#). AP members noted the continued importance of citizen science and in-person outreach initiatives, and in trying to demonstrate the value of participating in these efforts when communicating with fishermen.

#### **5. Golden Tilefish Catch Levels (Abbreviated Framework 4)**

Council staff presented information on Abbreviated Framework 4, which was initiated to implement catch levels based on the SEDAR 89 (2024) stock assessment of South Atlantic golden tilefish. This assessment indicated that the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing, but catch levels need to be reduced to allow biomass to increase back to a level that produces maximum sustainable yield.

Some AP members noted the increased recreational interest in golden tilefish, as well as access to those fishing grounds with improved technology.

AP members discussed the average size that is applied to calculate the recreational annual catch limit (ACL) (in numbers of fish) from the total ACL and acceptable biological catch (in pounds gutted weight). A recreational member noted that a 6-pound average seems small relative to what the recreational sector typically catches. A commercial dealer from Ponce Inlet, FL, noted a recent increase in smaller golden tilefish, while numbers of larger golden tilefish seem to be similar to previous years. Recreational and commercial members from other areas of the region commented they've seen a similar mixture of small and large fish being caught in the same areas. A charter captain from Atlantic Beach, NC, commented the small (~1 pound) fish were caught in his area when targeting the deeper end of the triggerfish depth range.

Some members discussed the potential alignment of the golden tilefish recreational season with recreational seasons of other deep water species. Comments were made in favor of aligning and not aligning the seasons, ultimately with the note that this conversation will be more fully addressed in a future amendment.

AP members noted that while the ACL reduction is relatively small, it is yet another of a growing number of species that are required to further restrict catch levels, even for a stock, in this case, that seems to be in a healthy condition. Additionally, factors like weather should especially be considered in management of deep water species, because that makes access to the fishing grounds much more variable than species nearer to shore and can limit fishermen's ability to regularly harvest optimum yield.

## **6. Gag Fishery Performance Report and Stock Risk Rating Update**

With input from the APs, [Fishery Performance Reports](#) (FPRs) have been developed for several South Atlantic species. The intent of the FPRs is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPRs will be provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP), and the Council to assist in their discussions. A stock assessment for the South Atlantic gag grouper stock is scheduled for completion at the end of 2026.

Council staff provided an overview of the previous FPRs, landings trends, and other background information. The AP focused their input based on a series of discussion questions, from which the FPR for red snapper will be updated. A copy of the full report, as well as other FPRs, will be uploaded to: <https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/FPRAll/>. The AP also recommended stock risk rating scores for gag to be considered in developing the stock risk rating that will be used in the acceptable biological catch control rule, following the gag stock assessment.

## **7. Lines of Communication Run-Through**

*Lines of Communication: Conversations with the Council* is a developing initiative to provide opportunities for Council members to have productive dialogues with fishery participants through a series of in-person meetings. Council staff conducted a practice run of the Lines meetings, with the AP representing fishery participants. The AP provided feedback to staff on discussion topics and meeting strategies that were useful or could be improved. This feedback will be compiled with that of other APs who completed a similar exercise and presented to the Council in June 2025.

## **8. Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule Stock Risk Rating Recommendations for Black Sea Bass**

An update to the SEDAR 76 stock assessment of black sea bass is being developed, and catch levels are expected to be recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee for Council review in June 2024. Under the newly-revised ABC Control Rule, the Council incorporates an evaluation of how much risk of overfishing it should be willing to accept.

The AP developed risk rating recommendations for black sea bass, which will be provided to the Council at their June 2025 meeting.

## **9. Black Sea Bass Assessment Response (SG Amendment 56)**

Amendment 56 responds to the most recent stock assessment of black sea bass, included data through 2021 and indicated that the black sea bass stock in the South Atlantic is at very low levels in recent years. Council staff updated the AP on recent amendment discussions. The AP provided the following comments and recommendations:

### *Recreational Bag Limit*

- The priority for the for-hire (charter/headboat) component of the fishery is to keep the season open as long as possible.
- The Council may want to consider reducing the bag limit in proportion to the ACL reduction to mitigate the possibility of a shortened season.
- The minimum bag limit that should be considered is the limit that would keep the fishery open for the entire year.

### *Recreational Size Limit Reduction*

- Some AP members expressed support for an 11-inch recreational size limit.
- For the for-hire component, the priority is to keep the season open as long as possible, using whatever combination of size limit, bag limit, and fishing year start date is necessary.

### *Recreational Seasonal Retention Closure*

- The priority for the for-hire component is to keep the season open as long as possible.
- Some AP members noted that less fishing happens overall from January through April. A closure during this time may be beneficial for black sea bass spawning.
- Off NC, black sea bass are an important recreational target during January-April, especially because few other species are open to be targeted during that time of year.
- While black sea bass have generally declined off Florida, some are caught off Jacksonville at the beginning of the year while cold winter waters are still there.

## 10. For-Hire Reporting Amendment

The AP discussed the Council's amendment to improve for-hire reporting for the snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo, and coastal migratory pelagics fisheries. Council staff updated the AP on recent amendment discussions, informed them of the upcoming scoping comment period, and asked them for feedback on the amendment topics. The AP provided the following comments and recommendations:

### *Reporting Frequency and Timing*

- Look at the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey (SRHS) for how data are validated and used in stock assessments and management.
- One AP member commented that reporting every 24 hours would provide more accurate information.
- Most AP members felt the current reporting frequency is working and doesn't need to change.
- Need more accountability and enforcement to improve reporting compliance and a lot of outreach. Need to put some "teeth" into the requirement.
- For outreach and education, consider comparing "bad reporting" vs "good reporting" scenarios to help fishermen understand why and how reporting is important and can benefit them.
- Could passive monitoring with a device, such as car insurance companies use, be considered?
- Consider that a number of the existing permits aren't being actively fished as they are held as "insurance" in anticipation of more regulatory restrictions or fisheries disappearing.
- Regarding the timing of reporting, AP members understood the benefit but most of them stated it would be very burdensome to increase the frequency.

### *Trip Notification*

- Explain how it might work as the amendment develops.
- It needs to be very simple for for-hire captains to do it.
- Hail out prior to a trip cannot be a specified time prior to the trip (i.e., X hours before a trip). Sometimes captains don't know until they arrive at the dock whether a trip will be taking place or not. Need an option to hail out in "real-time" without prior notice.
- It would be good if a trip notification could be incorporated into the reporting platform (e.g., VESL).
- The AP agreed that a trip notification should only be a requirement when the vessel is conducting activities for which the vessel is permitted (i.e., only for-hire fishing activity).

### *Landing Locations*

- The AP had no issues with a potential requirement for landing locations.
- Recommend re-wording the action to avoid confusion (i.e., current wording gives the impression that vessels can only offload at certain locations)

### *Validation Survey*

- Headboats already have validation incorporated into their survey.
- Survey should be conducted with captains and not the passengers/clients.
- AP members didn't have concerns about mandatory participation in a validation survey once it was clarified that such an action would simply make it unacceptable to refuse to be interviewed by a port sampler.

### *Reporting of Economic Data*

- It is complicated to break out some of the expenses that are currently required (e.g., fuel usage).
- AP members agreed they prefer less government intrusion and requiring reporting of economic data feels intrusive.
- Some AP members recognized the importance of generating economic value estimates for the for-hire industry.

### *Did Not Fish Reports*

- Current requirement is valuable when vessels must undergo repairs or captains face health or other issues.
- Consider adding a voluntary comment field so captains can have the option to specify the reason for submitting a DNF report. This could also be a potential way to identify vessels that have Southeast permits that aren't active.

## **11. South Atlantic Spawning Special Management Zones Research**

The AP received a presentation on work related to the Spawning Special Management Zones established through Snapper Grouper Amendment 36.

## **12. Council's 2023-2027 Research and Monitoring Plan**

The AP provided recommendations to Council staff on the 2023-2027 Research and Monitoring Plan. These recommendations will be compiled with those of other APs and presented for Council consideration at their June 2025 meeting.

## **13. SEDAR Update**

SEDAR staff updated the AP on recently finished, ongoing, and upcoming SEDAR projects. The most immediately upcoming projects include the SEDAR 90 (Red Snapper) Data Workshop in April 2025, review of the SEDAR 92 (Blueline Tilefish) assessment, and review of the updated SEDAR 76 (Black Sea Bass) assessment.

## **14. Other Business**

Vincent Bonura volunteered to serve as the Snapper Grouper AP's representative on the Wreckfish Advisory Panel.

The AP passed the following motion and provided the following associated comments to be brought to the Council's attention:

**MOTION:** RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL ALLOW MULTI-DAY COMMERCIAL TRIPS TO POSSESS MULTIPLE DAYS' WORTH OF SNAPPER GROUPER COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMITS.

**APPROVED BY AP**

- Some fishermen may be open to VMS/hail in-hail out to validate the number of days
- Could be considered through the Commercial SG Sub-Committee
- The number of days does not necessarily need to equate to the number of limits, but at least 2 days would help
- Consideration of this topic would likely require a future discussion about potentially shorter seasons if commercial catches per trip increase